

This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

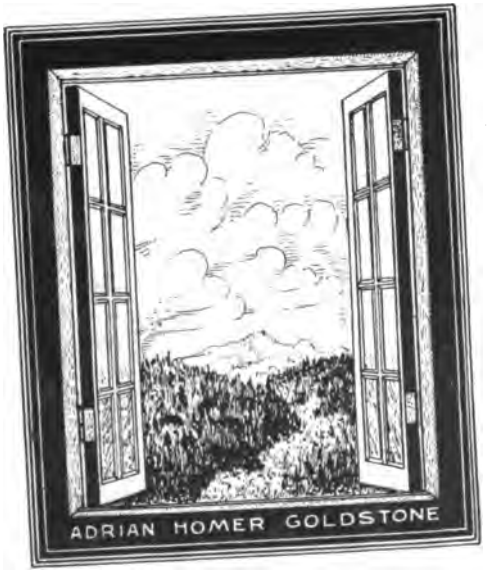
+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`


ADRIAN HOMER GOLDSTONE





BY THE SAME AUTHOR

CAPTAIN SHANNON

Fifth Edition. Cloth, 3s. 6d.; Paper Cover, 6d.

DAILY CHRONICLE.—"No man, possibly, but Dr. Conan Doyle could have treated such an admirable first idea as well as Mr. Kernahan has treated it. We had thought it almost impossible to add anything novel or noteworthy at this day to detective fiction. Mr. Kernahan undeceives us, and undeceives us very quickly. As an effort in the fiction of pure sensation it is a veritable *tour de force*. . . . The notion of concealing the prince of monsters upon one of the dynamite hulks off Canvey Island was a positive inspiration. The loneliness, the weird and watery surroundings, of this grim haven are described by Mr. Kernahan with an art rarely seen in detective fiction. There is real power here, and with power the ability to fascinate by suggestion, a form of fascination in which Poe excelled. Nothing more holding or more engrossing than the scene in which the Captain and his enemy are face to face upon a hulk containing enough dynamite to blow up a city, has been read by us for a long time. It is a worthy 'third act' to a book abounding from the first in the dramatic and the unexpected."

THE TIMES.—"He is perhaps the hundredth individual who in recent fiction has devoted himself to amateur detection, and he is certainly 'one in a hundred' as regards his exceptional success. . . . This simple sample must suffice for extract, but we may assure the reader that there are plenty more where it came from. 'Captain Shannon' is full of dramatic interest."

SPEAKER.—"The perils which Rissler has to undergo before he finally runs the victim to earth—or rather to water—are so terrible that they might well be warranted to turn the hair of any man white."

Mr. JAMES DOUGLAS in THE STAR.—"Surprise after surprise kept my attention, and I positively could not lay down the book until I had learned how Captain Shannon was run to earth, or rather to hell, at last. Note the fresh and vividly pictorial effect of the simple images which Mr. Kernahan employs. They remind one of that dead master of flashing metaphor—Robert Louis Stevenson."

THE SKETCH (Article on "The Book and Its Story," with Portrait.)—"With an ingenuity which recalls one of Edgar Allan Poe's detective stories he traces the Captain to one of the dynamite hulks stationed off Canvey Island, and Poe himself could hardly have hit upon a more appropriate hiding-place. . . . So absorbing and realistic is Mr. Kernahan's story that we awake out of it with a sigh of relief to find the General Post Office, Cheapside, the Underground Railway and Blackfriars Bridge standing where they did."

THE QUEEN.—"He has scored a tremendous success. 'Captain Shannon' is a most thrilling and terrifying book, and at the same time it is a most convincing book. You cannot lay your hand anywhere on a bit of the evidence or a bit in the behaviour of the parties, and say, 'This is not convincing they would not have done this.' . . . It is galloping all the time. It keeps one in a perspiration of excitement, and is brilliantly ingenious. Mr. Kernahan, as well as Dr. Doyle, is a detective story-writer of most unusual power."

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

SCOUNDRELS & CO.

Third Edition. Cloth, 3s. 6d.; Paper Cover, 6d.

THE WESTMINSTER GAZETTE says—"They are more desperate villains than any we have ever met, and would almost make a dead man's flesh creep. 'Scoundrels & Co.' certainly makes one 'sit up.'"

THE LADY'S PICTORIAL says—"Mr. Kernahan's 'Captain Shannon' ran 'Sherlock Holmes' very close. His 'Scoundrels' are magnificent."

THE ATHENÆUM says—"Grim and lurid as is his central idea of a criminal syndicate controlling all the various Socialisitc and Anarchical organizations of the day, it is invested with a marvellous air of plausibility."

THE GLOBE says—"No one who has read the first chapter will put the book down till he has read the last. It opens admirably, passing in the most natural fashion from the commonplace of everyday life to the unconventional and the vivid."

COUNTRY LIFE says—"In 'Captain Shannon' Mr. Kernahan showed us that in writing novels of the species detective he was quite prepared to dispute the first place with Dr. Conan Doyle, and in 'Scoundrels & Co.' he has established his position more strongly than ever."

THE SHEFFIELD DAILY TELEGRAPH says—"We hear a good deal about sensational novels, but if there has been anything to match 'Scoundrels & Co.' it has not been our fortune to find it. For straightforward unmitigated villainy we cannot recall anything to equal Mr. Kernahan's latest. Those who remember 'Captain Shannon' would expect something quite out of the way and dramatically effective, but we do not think any one would expect anything like the plot which Mr. Kernahan has conceived in this extraordinary work."

C. K. S. in THE SPHERE says—"Thrilling adventure in every page."

THE SCOTSMAN says—"One of the most original and diverting stories of diabolical crime ever told."

MR. JAMES DOUGLAS in THE STAR says—"Crammed with dramatic situations. Astonishingly vivid. Mr. Kernahan finishes with a magnificent *coup de theatre*."

THE DUNDEE ADVERTISER says—"A tale of extraordinary fascination, conceived in a supremely imaginative mood, and pieced together and elaborated with an ingenuity and dramatic apprehension that recall no less an exponent of sensational fiction than Poe."

THE BIRMINGHAM DAILY GAZETTE says—"Adventure follows adventure in rapid succession; climax is piled on climax; stirring events are followed by ghastly surprises. Often we found ourselves holding our breath as we followed with fascinated eyes the course of the story."

THE LEEDS MERCURY says—"The ordinary detective story is tame and dull beside this."

THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS says—"A great idea this. An hour or two is whiled away with almost incredible swiftness."

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

Third Thousand. Cloth, **3s. 6d.**

(Reprinted from the *Nineteenth Century*, *National Review*, *etc.*)

THE ATHENÆUM (five-column review).—"More vivid than many elaborate portraits. It would be hard to find better introductory studies. . . . Mr. Kernahan's readers will surely be grateful to him."

THE SPECTATOR.—"Truly, as well as finely said."

THE CONTEMPORARY REVIEW.—"A brilliantly versatile novelist and a charming essayist. A volume for which every student of our later literature will be grateful. Better, that is to say saner, criticism, has not appeared for many a day"

A Companion Volume to "Wise Men and a Fool."

SORROW AND SONG

5th Edition. Crown 8vo, buckram, **3s. 6d.**

(Reprinted from the *Fortnightly Review*, *London Quarterly Review*, *etc.*)

ATHENÆUM (four-column review, commencing on first page).—"Singular beauty and tenderness, but at the same time full of critical insight."

TIMES.—"By a writer of much insight and originality."

MORNING POST.—"Remarkable papers. Both as a psychologist and critic he is thoroughly conscientious and discriminative. Gracefully written, his study of Heine charms by its keen yet sympathetic appreciation of a complex genius, while the article on Robertson of Brighton and others in the volume are no less characterised by originality and serious thought."

LYRA ELEGANTIARUM

Edited by FREDERICK LOCKER-LAMPSON,
Assisted by COULSON KERNAHAN.

Mr. A. C. SWINBURNE in *Studies in Prose and Poetry*.—"There is no better or completer anthology in the language. I doubt, indeed, if there be any so good or so complete. No objection or suggestion which can reasonably be offered can in any way diminish our obligation, either to the original editor, or to his evidently able assistant, Mr. Kernahan."

A BOOK OF STRANGE SINS

Cloth, **3s. 6d.** *30th Thousand.*

THE ACADEMY.—"Such books are among the healthiest symptoms, not only of modern literature, but of modern thought. They are on the crest of the wave, whether we regard them from the artistic or the ethical standpoint. . . . His book is a fine one, and we think it will live."

A DEAD MAN'S DIARY

Cloth, **3s. 6d.** *40th Thousand.*

MR. J. M. BARRIE in the BRITISH WEEKLY.—"The vigour of this book is great, and the anonymous author has an uncommon gift of intensity. On many readers, it may be guessed, the book will have a mesmeric effect."

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

Companion Volume to "The Face Beyond the Door."

GOD AND THE ANT

150th Thousand.

(Translated into Eleven Languages.)

THE LITERARY WORLD.—"It may be said to speak as closely to the religious consciousness of the Nineteenth Century as Bunyan's immortal work did to that of the Seventeenth.

MR. MAX PEMBERTON in VANITY FAIR.—"He has risen to imaginative heights whither few living authors can follow him. Nor can I recall any finer picture in religious fiction than that which he has painted of the end of the world, and the coming of unnumbered souls to cry for vengeance before the throne of God."

IAN MACLAREN in THE BOOKMAN.—"He creates a daring situation—the arraignment of God by the victims on the other side of the grave—and uses it with strength and reverence. With earnestness also, and conviction. His answer is that which commends itself to many as the only light on the darkness. . . This is a book to read."

Companion Volume to "The Face Beyond the Door."

THE CHILD, THE WISE MAN, AND THE DEVIL

260th Thousand.

(Translated into Thirteen Languages.)

THE SATURDAY REVIEW.—"There is a touch of genius, perhaps even more than a touch, about this brilliant and original booklet."

THE LATE BISHOP OF LONDON (DR. MANDELL CREIGHTON).—"It puts with much imaginative force and beauty the central points in the relation of Christianity to life."

Rev. DR. JOHN CLIFFORD in THE STAR.—"Magnificent as the offspring of fancy, it is mightiest as the product of faith. There is not a false note in it. It rings with sincerity. Figures crowd its pages in pleasantest setting, like flowers in a sunlit landscape, but it is the blending of the forces of genius and faith which charms and binds men, and makes the booklet immortal."

Mr. A. T. QUILLER-COUCH in THE SPEAKER.—"It is, as is every story Mr. Kernahan writes, vivid and effectively told."

THE FACE BEYOND THE DOOR

Cloth, **2s.** ; *Paper Cover*, **1s.**

Mr. HAROLD BEGBIE in the DAILY MAIL.—"A remarkable work. The book is a white-hot persuasion to accept the idealistic interpretation of the universe; a poet's cry to a cold and colourless world to throw away a deadening scepticism and embrace the rich and gorgeous vision of faith. Crowded with pictures of great imaginative beauty.

Mr. B. FLETCHER ROBINSON (joint author, with Sir CONAN DOYLE, of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*) in the DAILY EXPRESS.—"There are two Coulson Kernahans: the one is a novelist who loves a good plot and a dashing adventure, the other a serious thinker, who rises to imaginative heights in his efforts to pierce the mystery that cloak the future life. It is "In Memoriam" in prose . . . with closer reasoned argument."

Joseph D. Robertson
with every good wish for
Xmas 1907
Ruthven

Edinburgh
28/12/07

THE JACKAL







"I saw Joyce fling up her arms" (*Page* 329).

The Jackal] [*Frontispiece*

THE JACKAL

BY

COULSON KERNAHAN

Author of "Captain Shannon" "Scoundrels & Co" etc

ILLUSTRATIONS BY HAROLD PIFFARD

LONDON

WARD LOCK AND CO LIMITED

1905



To

HOWEL SCRATTON

MY DEAR SCRATTON,

The necessity of finishing this yarn often kept me at work when otherwise you and I would have been roaming the country side together, or foregathering in your hospitable and beautiful home. Now that the story is at last finished, I should like to inscribe it to my dear friends, Howel and Mrs. Scratton, as well as to Dorothy, Peggy, Muriel, Humphry, Geoffrey, and Barbara Scratton, and to the horses, dogs, cats, rooks, parrots and other pets of Prittlewell Priory.

Always yours,

COULSON KERNAHAN.



CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I	The Abduction at St. Pancras	9
II	The Man with a Grin	30
III	Murder in the Mirror	55
IV	I Look Death in the Face	67
V	Red Hot Upon the Trail	78
VI	The Flabbergasted Funk of Mr. Norman	90
VII	How Norman & Co. made a Mummy of Me	100
VIII	A Scare and a Skedaddle	113
IX	A Clue	117
X	Lady Looking-Glass	126
XI	My First Love Affair	132
XII	I Interview Scotland Yard	149
XIII	Running Amok on a Motor	159

CHAP.		PAGE
XIV	Bicycle versus Motor . . .	173
XV	In which the Heroine Assaults the Police	192
XVI	I Find Myself in Heaven . .	208
XVII	Confusion and Cousin Clara . .	214
XVIII	Max Rissler, Kiss Investigator .	226
XIX	Let Cousinly Love Continue . .	236
XX	In which my Worst Fears are Realized	253
XXI	The Shadowing of a Shadower . .	262
XXII	The Jackal Takes a Long Jump . .	295
XXIII	A "Score" to Scotland Yard . .	310
XXIV	To Death Together . . .	323
XXV	The Soul of Joyce Fairfax . .	331

CHAPTER I

THE ABDUCTION AT ST. PANCRAS

SOMETHING had gone wrong at No. 1 platform, St. Pancras Station. The late comers who buy their evening papers as swallows feed—"on the wing"—by whisking up their favourite print, and dashing down the equivalent in coin, stared, as they hurried by, at the little old gentleman in a fur-lined overcoat, whose agitation was the cause of the commotion; and the row of heads, all craned inquisitively at one angle through the carriage windows, reminded one of a drill yard when the command has gone forth "eyes right!"

Then the engine gave a consequential whistle, as if to say: "Bear witness, good people all, that I at least—indifferent to anything so vulgar as idle curiosity—can look straight ahead of me and mind my own business." For a moment it seemed to strain heavily at the load. In the next there came the slow grinding of wheels, and then, as a runner ducks his head, clips close his elbows and clenches his fists, it settled down to work, breasting the fronting darkness bravely. One by one the out-popped heads

were reluctantly withdrawn, and the little old gentleman was left in indisputed possession of the platform and of the crowd.

"Where's the station master? I want the chief station master," he said peremptorily to the dejected-looking official whose hand was twiddling nervously at the broad black braid that bound his coat.

"Yes, my lord; certainly, my lord. I was about to suggest sending for him," stammered the other.

"Then why the deuce don't you do so?" spluttered the old gentleman. "Go for him, some of you, and as fast as you can. Say it's the Marquis of Southborne, and a matter of extreme urgency."

The Marquis of Southborne was a well-known figure at St. Pancras. It was by the Midland Railway that his princely country house was reached, and "special" trains for the safe conduct of royal and noble visitors, or for the convenience of the Marchioness and himself were constantly in requisition.

"Beg pardon, my lord. He's coming, he's coming!" said a porter, touching his cap and pointing to where the chief station master was, at full trot, turning the corner under the clock, preceded as "pace-maker" by the official who had proposed sending for him.

"Ah, I'm glad you've come," said the Marquis, hurrying forward. "Thank you for your promptness. I left the Marchioness standing here some quarter of an hour or so ago, while I went to the bookstall to make some purchases. On the way I asked this good man who has just fetched you to take her ladyship round to the Southend train, and put her into a first-class carriage. Long after I thought she was comfortably settled down into her corner, he comes to me and tells me she's not anywhere in the station, and though I've hunted high and low I can't see the slightest sign of her. She's not in any of the waiting-rooms, for I sent there to inquire the moment I knew she was missing, and I'm beginning not to like the look of it. Most of your men knew her by sight, I expect. She's dressed in mourning with an astrachan jacket and a big black hat. Will you have a thorough search made? And will you please put some one on watch at the approaches and exits to the station to see she isn't taken out in a cab? Possibly you'll think me fussy, but I assure you I have good reason for my anxiety. Now, do see to it at once, and I'll be infinitely obliged to you."

The station master was promptness itself. In less than half a minute the place was being searched from end to end, and men were set

on watch at all the exits, with instructions to keep an eye upon every one who went out, and to let no vehicle pass without satisfying themselves that the occupant was not the Marchioness of Southborne. Then he returned to the Marquis.

"Now that I have got things in working order," he said, "perhaps your lordship can give me some further particulars."

"Certainly, certainly. Much obliged to you for your prompt action. This is how it is—— But stop a minute. This man looks as if he had something to report. Yes? What is it? Have you found her?" he said eagerly, turning to a man in a bowler hat who was standing at salute.

"No, my lord. But you'll pardon me for interrupting you. I'm a detective—Detective Norman—and happening to be this way making some inquiries on business, and hearing what had happened, I thought perhaps I'd make myself known to your lordship in case I could be of any service."

"Quite right, officer," said the nobleman. "It is fortunate you happened to be on the spot. I was just about to tell the station master the facts, and shall be glad of your attention at the same time. This is the way of it: Lady Southborne and I came to town together, quite by ourselves, by the 5.10

express up from Southborne. Her brother is sailing for India from Tilbury Docks early to-morrow morning, and we were going down overnight to make sure of being in time to see him off. I thought it would perhaps save us the trouble of going across London to Fenchurch Street, if we caught the train that leaves No. 4 platform here at 6.30 for Southend, and then changed at Barking for the Tilbury line. Do you see?"

The hearers nodded.

"Well, I left Lady Southborne standing near here—just where you see that truck-load of luggage with a plaid rug on the top, is the exact spot as near as I can remember—and went to the bookstall to make some purchases. I expected to be a few minutes about it, as I wished to take some books to Tilbury for her brother to read on board. So I asked one of the company's servants, who knows us both very well, to find the Marchioness, and to put her in a comfortable first-class carriage of the Southend train.

"I thought she was in, and in fact I was just about to join her when the man came up to say she was not to be found. I was angry with him at first, for I supposed he'd missed her from carelessness, so I went to look for her myself, but I'm afraid there is only too good reason to fear that he's right.

There was absolutely no sign of her anywhere, and then——"

"And then your lordship began to get anxious," interrupted the detective quietly; "and with reason. I don't want to alarm you, my lord, but I must remind you that this isn't the first case of the sort. Several ladies have disappeared at different times and in the same way, within the last year, and I'm afraid——"

For one moment it looked as if the old gentleman was about to have a fit. He seemed trying to articulate, but his mouth dropped open—a mere hole in his face, and shapeless as the mouth of a canvas bag when the string is slackened. His head—like a balanced ball at the end of a conjuror's wand—trembled on his shoulder as if palsied. Then pulling himself together by a supreme effort, he leaned forward, catching at the lappels of the detective's coat to steady himself.

"That's just it! That's just what occurred to me!" he gasped. "Good God—you don't think it's possible——"

"We'll hope not," said the detective quietly; "but with your lordship's permission we won't discuss that just now. There's some business to be done first. It seems to me there are two ways in which this abduc-

tion—if abduction it is—might have been carried out. If you and her ladyship had been leaving the station, and had expected that your carriage would be here to meet you, I should say that the man who arranged the abduction had got to know of your plans, and had fixed up another carriage that would be the counterpart of your own, and had it waiting here when you arrived. And he'd have dressed up some one in a livery to match the Southborne livery, and disguised him so as to look exactly like your own footman. Then this man, that your lady thought was her own servant, would step up polite as possible. 'His lordship's gone on into the carriage, your ladyship!' says he, 'and instructs me to ask you to follow him.' She, never suspecting mischief, follows him innocently and steps into the carriage to join your lordship as she thinks. Then, when she's once in and before she has time to look round, the man inside clasps his chloroformed handkerchief over her mouth and the job's done."

Once again the unfortunate Marquis seemed as if he were about to be ill.

"My God!" he cried, clenching his teeth, and working with his fists as if he had his fingers round the abductor's throat. "My God—do you think——"

"No, no, my lord; I don't think it is so.

In fact I *know* it isn't so, for I was standing by when you first missed her ladyship, and before I made myself known to you, I had ascertained that no lady had been driven away from this station either in a cab or carriage within the time of her ladyship's disappearance. If the Marchioness had been carried off in that way, I should be on the track of that carriage now, instead of talking to you here."

"Thank you! Thank you!" said the Marquis putting his hand gratefully on the other's arm.

"Yes, and I've done more than that," went on the officer. "It seems to me that this is the way the thing's been managed. After you left her ladyship, the man who has done the job followed you and heard you say that her ladyship was to be put in the South-end train. Up he goes to her, bold as brass. 'This way, your ladyship,' says he. 'The Marquis has told me to put you into a comfortable carriage,' and she, poor lady, thinking it was all right, would very likely follow him and get into the carriage he pointed out."

Again the nobleman interrupted—

"You're right! you're right! That's just how it happened, I feel sure; for Lady Southborne dislikes smoke, and I've many a time had her put into a carriage by herself,

sending word that I was going into a smoking compartment and would join her later on in the journey."

"Is that so, my lord?" said the detective. "But we won't discuss it now, I want to come to the point. There are two trains that have gone out since your lordship and your lady arrived. One's the Southend train, and she wasn't in there, for my business here to-day was to nab a man—a defaulting cashier he is—that we expected would be travelling by that very train. We know that he'll try to get out of England, and there's a reason for thinking that Tilbury—not Liverpool or Southampton—will be his embarking place. So there's not been a soul pass up the platform to reach that train, that I haven't had my eye on, and I can swear that Lady Southborne—whom I know very well by sight—was not among them. The only other train that has gone out was the Manchester Express, which I expect is the one we must look after. If Lady Southborne's in there, the chances are that the man we want to get hold of, shows her into it just as it's about starting, waits by the door as if holding it open for your lordship, and then when he sees that no one is passing, he steps in as if—we'll say—to pull out a foot-warmer for her ladyship, and in an instant

pops his chloroformed handkerchief over her mouth and nose. Then when he sees she's gone off, he props her up in the corner, natural-like, as if she was resting, leans his own blackguard's body out of the window to hide as much of the carriage as he can, and to keep other people out, until the train starts."

"Good God, man!" exclaimed Lord Southborne, "why didn't you say all this before? There's not a moment to be lost. They must be followed. The Manchester mail must be stopped. I don't care——"

"Calm yourself, my lord! I beg you," replied the detective. "It is all right, I've seen to everything. They're in that train right enough, I expect, but it doesn't stop till it gets to St. Albans, and I've wired down to all the stopping places already. If there's any one answering to her ladyship's description in the train, or if there's a lady of any sort who seems drugged or ill, I've given instructions to detain her and whoever's with her, till we're satisfied they aren't the parties we want. So, as you see, I have done what *can* be done, and we'll hope for the best results."

"Forgive me! forgive me!" said the Marquis. "You couldn't have done better. I'm infinitely obliged to you for your fore-

sight and your promptness, which I'll take good care don't go unrewarded."

"Your lordship's most kind, I'm sure!" said the gratified officer. "And now might I make so bold as to put a rather important question? I'm only doing so in the interests of the case."

"Ask what you like," replied the nobleman.

"Well, it's like this," went on the emboldened detective. "Your lordship will excuse me, but I believe her ladyship is very beautiful and is—er—is, in fact, much younger than——"

He stopped lamely, and it was pitiful to see the effort which the old aristocrat—wincing under the gouge of the words—made to control himself. For one instant he drew himself up and flashed upon the other a look of haughty surprise. Then telling himself perhaps that detectives, like doctors, are privileged and are allowed to put intimate and personal questions which on the part of other persons would be resented as offensively impertinent, he said curtly—

"Yes, yes. You were about to observe that Lady Southborne is very much my junior. You are quite right. Quite right. Have you anything else to ask?"

"Yes, my lord. There is one other question," said the man awkwardly. "You

see it's like this. To abduct—kidnap, if you like to call it so—any one who isn't a child—any one who has come to mature age and is as able to take care of herself as we'll suppose her ladyship is, wouldn't be an easy thing at the best of times. But in a public place like this, with yourself within calling distance and lots of people about, it must have wanted some doing. Well, one of two things is true. Either her ladyship went of her own will, or she went against it. Now you don't think, do you, that there's any possibility whatever —mind I only say a possibility—of her ladyship's having gone by her own consent? Women—no offence to you, my lord, or to her ladyship—are kittle-cattle. I have known cases where ladies, who were married to gentlemen not quite as young as themselves—as might happen to you or me—I have known cases where such ladies have given their husbands the slip on purpose, and let themselves be taken away by some one they cared about. Now in her ladyship's case we can take it for granted that it isn't *that* way about, can't we?"

"You can take it for granted," said the Marquis, in a tone of such perfect self-possession that neither of his auditors suspected what control he was putting upon himself. "You can take it for granted that

that aspect of the question is so entirely impossible that it will be unnecessary to discuss it or to allude to it again."

"Quite so. Quite so. I was sure of it beforehand," said the detective soothingly. "Then in that case we have two alternatives before us. It's very possible that no more harm is intended than to bleed your lordship—who is known to be a rich man—to the tune of ransom money. In which case we're bound to have news of her ladyship before long. You'll have a letter from her or from the rascals who have got hold of her—very likely from both—naming the amount that's asked by way of ransom and laying down the lines upon which the negotiations must be carried on, so that the blackguards can ensure the safety of their own precious skins."

The Marquis looked somewhat relieved. "I hope it may prove to be so," he said. "You'll think it immoral of me, perhaps, to be ready to come to terms with such ruffians, but I'll be honest with you, and admit that I'll do anything, pay anything, put up with anything, if only I can get her back safe and sound again. But really, officer—Norman you said your name was, didn't you?—don't you think that this carrying off of ladies, with a view to obtaining ransom, sounds more like what might take place among the mountains

of Italy or Greece, than in the heart of police-controlled, law-regulated London? And mind you, it isn't among the slums and rabbit warrens of the East End that the Marchioness has disappeared, but at St. Pancras Station, which is in a respectable neighbourhood, where villains of the type you speak of are not likely to take shelter."

The officer laughed.

"Would your lordship be surprised to hear that this part of London is a sink of iniquity? There are scores of places within a quarter of a mile of St. Pancras and King's Cross where men and women—men more often than women—could be decoyed and robbed, or decoyed and murdered, with all the impunity with which the Greek and Italian brigands go to work in their mountain fastnesses. And as for your supposing that the carrying off of people of position, in order to obtain a ransom, doesn't occur in England—I can assure you that that sort of thing has happened oftener than you'd believe. Yes; and many a time the money has been paid and nothing said of it, so as to hush up what might get made into a scandal. That's one of the difficulties we have to contend with. It's the people who do that sort of thing—your lordship must pardon me for being outspoken—pay up, I mean, and let the

rascals go scot-free rather than risk publicity and a public scandal—who make such villainies possible. If they were to hand over to us all communications they receive, and leave the matter entirely in our hands, we'd soon find their missing friends for them and bring the rascals who were at the bottom of the business to justice."

"I know! I know!" interrupted the Marquis testily. "We needn't discuss that now." With a wave of his hand, he seemed to dismiss that aspect of the case from consideration.

"You said, Norman," he went on, "that in regard to the Marchioness's disappearance there were two alternatives. One was that she had been carried off with a view to extorting ransom-money, the other——"

"The other," broke in the detective, "is more serious, my lord; and to tell the honest truth, it's that that I'm most afraid of. It's no good my beating about the bush or attempting to disguise from your lordship the fact that the disappearances of this sort which have taken place lately are the most mysterious occurrences we have ever had to deal with, within my memory. And what puts us so completely at fault is the difficulty in finding a motive for the crime. You see these disappearances are altogether

different from the vulgar abductions that now and then come before the police courts, and so get into the papers. If they were not, I, for one, shouldn't concern myself about them. Cases of that sort can be left in the hands of any officer of ordinary intelligence. They present no problem, and call for no exercise of reasoning power, for at best they are vulgar and uninteresting. But these disappearances are very different. There's brains at the back of them, or they would not have been so uniformally successful. We have had twelve months of them, you must remember, and who the principal is, or who the principals are, we haven't any more idea to-day than we had this time last year. The thing is complex, mysterious—almost romantic. It has puzzled some of the cleverest heads in England, and is likely to keep them puzzling, for until the police can satisfy themselves about the abductor's motive, they are working at a big disadvantage. Take that first disappearance—you'll remember it—Miss Schornstein, the crippled lady that played the violin. Well, it couldn't have been for her looks, for she is plain, not to say ugly. And it couldn't have been for money, because she had only just come out as a violinist and wasn't worth a cent. Well, up at Scotland Yard they put it down to pro-

fessional jealousy, and I don't mind telling you, my lord, that a close watch was kept upon any of her fellow artistes with whom she might have come into competition, not to speak of sharp inquiries into their past. But Scotland Yard is satisfied that none of them had anything to do with it. And it wasn't homicidal mania, for the lady 's alive to-day. Her sister has had letters which she swears are in Miss Schornstein's handwriting, and that from the way they're written, and by the things they say, couldn't have come from any one but the missing lady herself. They tell the sister that Miss Schornstein is permitted to say that she is alive and well, but they don't afford a clue of any sort as to where she is or who it was carried her off. The next one to disappear was a lady rather high up in the society world, and there the motive for abducting her was even more mysterious. She wasn't rich, she wasn't young, she wasn't good-looking, she wasn't anything that I know of, but there again there comes a letter in her own handwriting to say she is all right, but there again some one had taken care that there was nothing in the letter that gave as much as a shadow of a clue to her whereabouts. Then Miss Evelyn Talfourd, the actress, goes out shopping one day and never comes back. She, I admit, was a

spanker, and a famous society beauty, but the one who disappeared after her was quite a middle-aged lady who wore her hair cut short and divided at the side like a man's, and who they tell me had a mind of her own and a sharp tongue to speak it with. There have been other disappearances, as you, my lord, are aware, and if there were only one feature which was common to every case, we should be better able to form some idea as to the motive for these abductions. When once you've got your motive, the chances are that one of the various theories you set up may be the true one, and so it may put you working upon the right lines and help you to lay the villain, whoever he may be, by the heels. In every other series of crimes that I've known of, presumably committed by the same person or persons, there has been some common feature known to the police, though the knowledge of it may not have reached the public. In this or that series of murders there has been perhaps a curious mutilation of the victim's body ; in others the murderer leaves a sort of trade mark behind him in the shape of some figure or letters scrawled rudely, sometimes upon the scene of the crime, sometimes upon a sheet of paper pinned to the victim's clothes. In either of these cases we are tolerably safe in concluding he's either

a fanatic or a madman, which is very much the same thing. In other instances the man may be too shrewd to give himself away by playing such fools' tricks, and doesn't—intentionally—leave anything behind him that helps the police to connect one of his crimes with the crime preceding or following it. But he does do so unintentionally, for when one man commits a series of crimes, there is nearly always a similarity of some sort which supplies a connecting link. You, my lord, have written several novels, as I'm aware, for I have had the pleasure of reading them, being a bit of a reading man myself. Now if your lordship will allow me to say so, there's a good deal of what they call "internal evidence" to connect your first novel with your second. It's surprising how little originality there is in most of us—no offence to your lordship I hope. Most novelists who make a hit with any particular book follow it up with two or three more upon similar lines. And when a criminal carries out a crime successfully, the chances are three to one upon his going to work in a somewhat similar way in his next venture."

It is not every day that a detective has an opportunity of airing his theories upon the investigation of crime to a peer of the realm, and the astute officer seemed bent upon im-

proving the occasion. At this point of the discussion it occurred to him that the attention of the Marquis as well as of the Station Master was wandering. Following the direction of their eyes, he saw a man coming rapidly along the platform.

It is curious how swiftly a Londoner is aware that something is astir. No word need be spoken, no movement made, but if something be brewing, if news be abroad, a Londoner is immediately alert. As a medium for conveying mental impressions, the foggy atmosphere of the Metropolis seems magnetic. Your cockney scents a coming sensation as a bloodhound scents its quarry. It is a rumour in the air, an odour on the wind, ere yet the thing be brought to birth.

The man in question had spoken no word, had made no sign, yet the loungers on the platform knew by instinct that he was the bearer of news. Just as the outside world darkens at withdrawal of the sun, so the great station—a world in miniature, domed in under heavens of glass—seemed suddenly to grow grey with the sense of coming calamity.

The man had barely made his appearance before there was an instantaneous scurry in his direction. One was reminded of chickens scratching in a farmyard, when a fowl, more fortunate than his fellows, unearths a fat

worm. Before he can bolt his wriggling breakfast, a score of comrades catching sight of the savoury morsel, incontinently abandon their own vantage ground, and flap, fly, or scurry, helter-skelter towards him, if haply they may rend the booty from his beak.

It was so that the crowd closed in upon the man, as he stood cap in hand, before the station master and the Marquis.

"Telegram just come to hand, sir, about the Manchester mail," he said, addressing the station master.

"The Manchester mail! did you say?" gasped the Marquis. "Yes, yes, we're expecting a telegram. It's about—about Lady Southborne, isn't it? She's in that train. Is she found? is she safe? Quick, man! Speak!"

"No, my lord, the telegram doesn't mention Lady Southborne," was the answer. "It's bad news, I'm sorry to say—a collision—just outside St. Albans. The Manchester mail—Hold up, my lord, hold up!"

He spoke to deaf ears, for the little old gentleman in a fur coat was already writhing at his feet in a fit.

Something had happened in sober earnest at No. 1 platform, St. Pancras Station.

CHAPTER II

THE MAN WITH A GRIN

THE day after the disappearance of Lady Southborne, I was sitting at breakfast in the little cottage on the borders of Epping Forest, whither it was my custom to betake myself when I had a piece of work on hand, and wished to be absolutely alone. It so happened that on the previous evening I had gone to St. Pancras Station to see a friend off, and so had been present when the events already recorded took place.

Hence on this particular morning I opened my newspapers with some interest. The first item to catch my eye was headed—

"ACCIDENT ON THE MIDLAND RAILWAY.

"NARROW ESCAPE OF THE MANCHESTER MAIL.

"What might have been a very serious accident took place last evening on the Midland Railway at St. Albans," ran the report. "Just as the Manchester Mail from St. Pancras was entering the station, a large trolley at the far end of the platform—set in motion, it is believed, by some lads who were

returning from a football match—was seen to be moving, and, before it could be reached, had precipitated itself over the edge of the platform in front of the advancing engine. But for the fact that the train had slowed down preparatory to stopping at the station, the result might have been lamentable. The passengers, who were naturally much alarmed, at once left the carriages, and swarming along the line made their way to the platform. It was reported in London last night that several passengers had been killed, but we are glad to say that though a number of people were severely bruised and shaken, the only life lost was that of the engine driver, who was thrown forward so violently that his neck was broken on the spot. The names of the lads who are suspected of being the cause of the accident were taken, and an inquiry is being instituted."

Another news item in which I was interested ran as follows:—

"THE NEW TERROR.

"ANOTHER 'VANISHING LADY.'

"THE WOMAN ABDUCTOR AGAIN AT WORK.

"*Mysterious Disappearance of the Marchioness of Southborne.*

"'Whose turn will it be next?' is the question which the public will ask when it

learns that another of those mysterious abductions which have created something like a panic in the country took place last night at St. Pancras Station. The abductor, whoever he may be, is apparently no respecter of persons, for this time the victim is no less exalted a lady than the beautiful and accomplished Marchioness of Southborne. There is ground for believing that the Marchioness had been induced to enter an empty carriage of the Manchester mail, under the pretence that it was the train by which she and the Marquis were to journey to Barking, and that Lord Southborne was about to join her. It is suggested that she was then chloroformed by the abductor and his accomplices, who had contrived in some way to keep the carriage to themselves. In view of this theory, the police had, we understand, wired to the first stopping-place, which was St. Albans, giving instructions that the train should be searched and that should a lady who seemed drugged or ill be found among the passengers, she and her companions should be detained pending inquiries. Unfortunately, the accident on the Midland Railway, a report of which will be found in another portion of this issue, interfered with the programme which the police had drawn up, and it is feared that the abductors contrived, amid the confusion

and consternation, to make their escape with their victim. It has been suggested that the accident was connected with the abduction, but that, we understand, is a theory which neither the police nor the authorities of the Railway Company are inclined to entertain."

I had finished reading thus far, and had put down the newspaper to help myself to some ham, when there was a knock at the outside door. "Come in," I shouted. Except for an old woman who looked in for an hour or two every afternoon to tidy up and do some plain cooking, I was quite by myself in the house.

I heard the outside door open, some one step in and walk across the tiny hall to the door of my sitting-room, where a second rap was given.

"Come in," I repeated, expecting no caller of more importance than perhaps some messenger to say that my old dame was ill, and that I must make shift to do without her services that day, as had happened once or twice before.

But I was mistaken, for when the door opened, I saw a tall, bearded soldierly-looking man standing, hat in hand, in a deferential attitude on the threshold.

"Good-morning," he said, in a pleasant cheery voice, "hope I'm not disturbing you. It's too bad troubling you so early, but I'm told that you think out most of your plots walking—*solvitur ambulando*, the phrase goes, doesn't it?—and that one never quite knows when to find you in, after breakfast time. Isn't that so?"

"That is so," I said, "but I'm puzzled to know how you came to hear it, for I took this cottage for the very reason that I don't know a soul in the neighbourhood, and even my letters are being directed to me by another name. I'm curious to know how you found me out. Won't you come in and sit down?"

"Thank you," he said, seating himself in the chair facing me on the other side of the table, and laying his hat on the floor beside him. "Never mind how I found you out; I've found you in, and that's the main point. Can you spare me a minute? I'm not collecting for a charity, and I haven't come to ask for money. On the contrary, I've come to offer you a post that in the matter of payment would make a Cabinet Minister turn green with envy. I've come to put such a sum of money in your way that until you have heard me out, and until I've satisfied you by taking you to the bank and letting you draw your first year's salary and carry

it away in hard cash, will make you fancy that I'm mad."

"Really," I said, "you make me curious. Well, fire away, I'm listening. Do you mind if I go on with my breakfast meanwhile, as if it gets cold I've no servant to make fresh tea, and stewed tea——"

"Stewed tea," he interrupted, "is a dodge of the devil's to get even with the teetotalers. It's worse than the drink. Drink only ruins their nerves; tea ruins their nerves as well as their tempers. The drink makes them see devils, and the tea makes them be devils. Teetotalers tell you that all strong drink is of hell; but in my opinion stewed tea is a liquor of the devil's own brewing, and I believe he always keeps a pot hot upon the hob for any one who happens to come his way."

I laughed. Here was evidently a fellow of some originality. "Then it is no use offering you a cup?" I said, "I suppose you've breakfasted?"

"Breakfast," he replied, "is a meal for beasts and barbarians. The morning air is too pure a thing to be polluted by the rank smell of greasy bacon. I haven't touched breakfast for years. I'm Continental in my habits. Besides, it spoils the flavour of one's tobacco. May I smoke?"

For answer I pushed my cigar case across the table. He selected one carefully, smelt it, bit off the end, chewing the piece as critically as a tea-taster might sample a brand of tea, and then, as if satisfied, lighted up, and leaned back leisurely in the chair.

While all this was going on, I was taking a good look at him over the breakfast things. That he was a handsome man there was no denying. But his blue eyes—now a trifle faded—were a little too light, too bold, and too prominent. His age I judged to be thirty or thereabout, and I could believe that ten years earlier his expression, which even now was pleasant, had been frank and engaging. Time had neither thinned nor silvered his curly straw-coloured hair, but what in early manhood had no doubt been healthy fairness of complexion had now deepened into a flush; the nose which, then, had perhaps been finely shaped, had become a trifle fleshy, the lips flabby and less firm. Everything about him suggested that he was one who had coarsened as he grew older, but as I have said, he was a man who would be described as "handsome," and generally as "pleasant."

As I looked at him there came suddenly over his face a change which, were it not an essential point in the thread of this story, I should have passed over in silence. One would

naturally wish to avoid speaking even remotely about a fellow creature's physical infirmities, but as the man is now dead, and was like no other living soul that ever I saw or heard of, I shall hope to be forgiven for alluding to a peculiarity, but for which this story would probably never have been written.

He had scarcely made an end of speaking before he suddenly hunched his shoulders as if hugging himself with secret joy; the eyes puckered, the upper lip shortened, so as to lay bare the gums and the fang-like teeth, and over the face passed the most extraordinary contortion of a grin I have ever witnessed. Due to some nervous affection, it was entirely different from the ordinary twitching which is a common symptom of St. Vitus's dance. To that, one soon becomes so accustomed as scarcely to notice it. It is a mere outer twitching or spasmodic contraction of the muscles and does not alter the character of the face. But this man's grin-like contortion seemed to come from within. The hidden soul of him seemed to grin out and gloat upon his face. It was as if a dog had suddenly smiled upon you, if one can imagine a dog smiling, in the act of snarling. Then, as suddenly as it came, the grin was gone; and looking at the composed face of the man, one asked oneself whether one had not been

the victim of an optical delusion, whether these set and controlled features could be the same which a moment ago had been contorted in a gargoyle-like grimace.

My visitor took a long pull at his cigar, and then holding it between his finger and thumb, he turned it round to examine first one end and then the other.

"I've come to see you, sir," he said, without taking his eyes from the cigar, "on a matter of business. You are, I believe, one of those rather impertinent persons who, because they don't find their own legitimate line of business —authorship—pay them any too well, have taken to try to make money by telling the members of another and more useful profession —the police—how they ought to go to work to succeed in theirs. In other words, you are one of those mongrel products of modernity— a sort of hyphen between two respectable professions—a detective-author or an author-detective, whichever name you may elect to be known by."

The grin passed over his face again, after which he took another long pull at the weed.

"Your cigars are a better brand than your books," he said. "I've read your stories, but this is the first of your 'smokes' that I've sampled. There is an indefinable quality about a good 'smoke' as well as about a good story.

It's all a question of 'style.' What we call 'beauty' in a woman, 'bouquet' in a wine, 'aroma' in a cigar, 'distinction' in a story, is only saying in other words that the woman, the wine, the smoke, or the story has got the quality of 'style.' There's 'style' in every sniff of this Havana. Why don't you put a little of it into your stories?"

"Yes," I said, "and there's style in the way of swinging a horsewhip. If I were to put a little of it into a certain person's hide, that hide would be set tingling, for all its thickness. If your impudence weren't amusing, I should——"

"Don't get angry," he broke in, with a deprecatory shrug of his shoulders, and opening of his palms. "It is business I have come to see you about, after all, but business would be dry work without an occasional joke. These little things add zest to life. Now look here! You are Mr. Max Rissler, the detective-novelist, aren't you? Well, my friend, I have come to make you an offer. I'm only the agent, not the principal, but the long and short of it is that my principal has followed your detective work, and has got it into his head that you're a deuced clever fellow and a genius of an organizer. I don't agree with him, so I tell you plainly, and I have done my best to dissuade him from making over-

tures to you. But the fellow's as obstinate as a woman, and, as he is fabulously rich, I suppose he's got to have his own way. The post he offers you is worth a lot of money, but I must tell you beforehand that you may not think the business in which he wants you to engage, quite legitimate, and so before I go any further I must have your oath on the Testament that, if you refuse our offer, you'll not attempt to follow me from this house. What I shall *have* to tell you will, it is true, put you in possession of certain facts, but I shall take care not to furnish you with anything in the nature of a clue, and facts without clues aren't of much use to any one. I don't fancy you can do us any mischief, for although you no doubt think yourself a mighty clever man, Mr. Max Rissler, I'm ready to back my brains against yours. But one risk, I don't intend to run, is to have you shadowing me from here. With a reasonable start I'll defy you to get on my traces; but I don't choose to give you a chance to play any of your hanky-panky detective tricks by following me up from this house; so I must have your oath on the Testament that you'll not stir from that chair, either while I'm here, or for thirty minutes by the clock after I've left this room. Is it a bargain?"

"No," I said; "I can't tie myself down to

any conditions of that sort while I'm as much in the dark as I am at present. If you'll give me an idea—only in the vaguest way, I mean —as to the nature of the business in which you wish me to mix myself up, I'll decide one way or the other right off, but I can't make any promises as the thing stands at present."

"All right," he said, grinning at me like a dissolute gargoyle, "I take it you mean what you say when you decline; and as you are no wiser, in regard to what the business is, than when I first had the pleasure of making your acquaintance, I'll wish you good-day."

"Stop a minute," I said, for I had been turning the matter over in my mind while he was speaking. By giving the promise he asked I should in no way commit myself towards accepting his offer, and I might at least learn something that it would be worth my while to know. As matters stood, I knew nothing whatever against him that would warrant me in taking action, either by setting a watch upon him, or by calling in the police. He had admitted that it was possible I might consider the business in which he wished me to engage as "not legitimate," but it did not necessarily follow that it was unlawful. I had therefore everything to gain and nothing to lose by giving the promise he required.

"I accept your conditions," I said.

"I thought you would," he replied, "but I can't say I'm glad of it. Personally, I'd very much rather play the game at single wicket off my own bat than make it double wicket and have you batting at the other end. But if I hadn't made you the offer fair and square, my principal's the sort of man to have got to know of it, and I make it a rule never to play tricks with him. Now perhaps you'll take your oath on the Testament not to move from that chair nor from this room for thirty minutes by the clock after I've left the house."

These preliminaries being arranged, he settled down to business.

"My principal," he said, "is fabulously rich, and rich folk have curious crazes. Some of them go in for horse-racing, others for philanthropy—both expensive amusements, and both come to very much the same thing when you've done, for it's generally rogues and spongers that pocket the coin. One Crœsus spends his money on yachts, another goes in for collecting first editions, and when a man has got the collecting craze on him, his conscience goes by the board. I know one enthusiast at the present moment, a gentleman, too, and as straight as a die in everything outside his craze. He'd set his heart on a certain edition of a very rare book which he wanted

to complete his set, and when he found he couldn't come by it honestly, he stole the only known copy, like a common thief. Well, to come to the point, I'd better tell you at once that I'm acting on behalf of those parties who are responsible for these curious abductions that have taken place. Now don't get excited. You'll say perhaps that the word of a man who can hire himself out on such a business isn't worth a caterpillar's cast-off coat, and I won't deny that you've got reason on your side. But I swear to you, sir, in the name of the God who made us, that—with the single exception of restrictions being placed upon their liberty —these ladies are as safe from even the shadow of harm as if they were in their own homes. Mind, I'm not defending the responsible parties. That folk should be carried off and retained as prisoners against their will, and away from their friends and families, is grievance enough, I grant you. But I'll go bail with my life that every respect, every consideration, is shown to these ladies. I can't tell you more at present, for until I've got your definite promise to act with us, I must give you no information that might serve as a possible clue. It certainly is the most singular and most mysterious business that ever was imagined, and when you get to know more of it, you'll find it more mysterious still."

"And what is it that you, or rather your principal, wants me to do?" I demanded.

"To plan out, organize and superintend the carrying out of the abductions. You won't be asked to take any part in the actual business —your part is to be the brains at the back of it. You won't be asked to take any risk, for— Now stop a minute, sir; I know what you are going to say. You are going to say that if we hadn't got this table between us, and I hadn't taken care to place myself out of your reach, and you hadn't given your promise not to stir from that chair while I'm in the room, nor for thirty minutes after I leave it, you'd be giving me a taste of that horsewhip you are so very fond of, for daring to come here and make such a proposal to an honest man. Isn't that so?"

I smiled grimly. The fellow had diagnosed the case to a nicety.

"But stop a minute," he went on, with one of his snarl-and-smile grins, "every man's got his price, to my thinking, and you'd better hear my principal's terms before you make up your mind finally."

He took a bundle of letters from an inside pocket. One which was of a grey tint he picked out and placed upon the table in front of him. I looked curiously at the letter as it lay there, but as it was folded across the middle

and the outside page was a blank, I could make nothing of it. It so happened, however, that I had that very morning received a letter written upon paper of precisely the same tint and apparently of the same size. It lay upon the breakfast table at that moment, but being behind the tea-pot, the chances were against his having seen it.

"This is what my principal says," he continued, taking up the letter that he had placed in front of him, and opening it, "listen, I'll read it to you."

"'Tell Mr. Max Rissler that I'm prepared to pay his own price. Money is absolutely no object with me, for my means are practically unlimited. I have two reasons for making him this offer. The first is that I know of no one to whom I can entrust the carrying out of my instructions with such confidence as to him. He is the best man for the post that I know of, and the best man I will have —in this matter as in other matters—cost what it will. I am aware that if you can put a hitch in the way of securing Rissler, you will do so. But you know me, and you know that I brook no opposition to my will. Your business is to carry out my wishes. See to it, then, that you secure Rissler's services. If the negotiation fail through any fault of yours, it will be the worse for you. My second

reason is that I know, and you know, that Rissler has on his own account already started making investigations into these abductions, and I don't choose to have him working against us. Point out to him how much more to his interest it will be to be working on my side, instead of on the other. Supposing he succeeds —which he never will, for one man working by himself, as he works, is powerless against such means as I have at my command—what would be his reward? A beggarly thousand or two at most. If he place his services at my disposal I will pay him £10,000 a year, £12,000 a year, £15,000 a year if he likes; and he can draw the first year's salary in advance, as earnest of my good faith; and the sum I name would be exclusive of expenses. You must get him. On that I am determined, let his price be what it will. See to it, then, you do not fail me in this."

"Those, sir," said my visitor, "are my instructions, and with every respect for what you called your conscience, I guess you aren't going to stand out against an offer like that. You wouldn't be human if you did, and I fancy you're built like the rest of us in that respect."

"It *is* a tempting offer," I said hesitatingly, and in a voice which I hoped would indicate some intention of yielding. "May

I read for myself what your principal says?"

I held out my hand for the letter as I spoke. A sight of it might give me a clue to his, or to his principal's, indentity.

"All in good time," he made answer, folding it and laying it in front of him upon the table. "You shall know all you ought to know when you've made up your mind, and I don't suppose it will take you very long to do that. By the bye, I ought to tell you that we don't go into the business with our eyes shut. We're prepared to give you a substantial guarantee of good faith on our part, but I need hardly point out that we shall want a similar guarantee upon yours. We've talked the matter over, my principal and I, and he's hit upon a plan which, if it holds you tightly, you can't possibly object to—supposing you mean to run straight. If you mean to run crooked and to play us false, I warn you beforehand that you'd be wise to insure your life heavily and make a will. It's a wonderful comfort to a man in his last moments to know that those he leaves behind won't be altogether unprovided for."

There was a grimness in the way the fellow spoke which warned me that here at least was no idle threat, but for the present I had business in hand, and had no time for weighing

risks. That the business which I counted so pressing was concerned with the letter, the reader will have surmised. My visitor was right in saying that I had already interested myself in the matter of the abductions, but up to the present I was entirely without a clue. That letter would, in all probability, furnish the clue for which I had been seeking, and I was determined to possess myself of it at all costs.

"£15,000 a year is the right sort of grease to use for a creaking conscience," I said. "I thought mine was temptation proof, but hang it, man, you've roused the devil of gain in me, and I don't find it so easy to say 'No' as I thought I should. £15,000 at four per cent. would mean—let me see—yes, £600 a year. A competence, by Jove, for a man of modest tastes like myself. Confound you for an infernal tempter, I *ought* to say 'No,' yet I *want* to say 'Yes.' But there are risks to be considered, and I mustn't overlook them. Do you mind if I go on with my breakfast while I think it over?"

"Do so by all means," he answered. "I'm in no hurry. Conscience is a visitor that we should never entertain on an empty stomach. She can be as cantankerous to a man who's fasting, as she can be complacent to the same man when he's full."

I laughed. "Light another cigar," I said, pointing to the case. "It would fidget me to sit here grubbing and leave you with nothing to do but twiddle your thumbs."

Then I made a pretence of attacking my breakfast, but I promise you I had an eye upon him all the time.

While he was perparing to light up, I was plying the pepper-caster, and, at the moment of the striking of the match, I managed, unseen by him, to detach the perforated top, and to spill a quantity of the pepper into the palm of my hand. My handkerchief was lying open on my lap, and dropping the handful of pepper into the centre of it, I rolled the thing into a ball, and, returning it to my pocket, made another start upon my breakfast. By and by I hauled out the handkerchief, jerking it sharply in his direction as I did so, thereby scattering the pepper—the pollen of a sneeze—under his very nostrils.

My experiment in this novel form of wireless telegraphy succeeded. His eyes watered, and taking a long breath, with head held back, eyelids lowered, and mouth open, he prepared to sneeze.

Now I will not go so far as to say that it is impossible to sneeze without shutting one's eyes. There may be folks in the world—

freaks, I should call them—who have acquired that difficult accomplishment, but if so, I have not been privileged to meet with them. That the natural man shuts both eyes in the act of sneezing, I must unhesitatingly aver; and so far as my visitor was concerned, I am in a position to certify that his habits were normal. About the closing of his eyes there was no doubt. My pepper must have been of unusual pungency, for never in my life have I seen a man get more out of a sneeze for his money. Not once, but half a dozen times his hearty "t'chu" set the rafters ringing, after which, with the assistance of his handkerchief he brought the performance to a close by an excellent imitation of a solo upon a low-spirited fog-horn when the instrumentalist is suffering from influenza.

I had not been idle meanwhile. Ruffian though he was, he had not forgotten, in the first manifestation of an approaching sneeze, to turn his head aside from my breakfast table, and this gave me my opportunity.

I have said that I had received that morning a letter written upon paper of the same tint and of the same size as the letter which he had read to me. My letter lay beside me upon the breakfast table; his was upon the table in front of him but well within reach of

my hand. Both were folded in the same way across the middle, and as the outer side of each was blank, the two letters were as like each other as a couple of postage stamps. No sooner was his head turned aside than I had whipped my letter into my lap, and, at the moment of his closing his eyes in a sneeze, I had, all unsuspected by him, made the exchange.

There was now no longer any need to dissemble, and something in my manner—it may have been suppressed excitement at the success which had attended my experiment—seemed to warn him that developments were nigh.

"The Grand Jury have returned a true bill, I see," he said. "In other words, you've made up your mind, young man, and you're in dead earnest now at all events. I'm to go back and tell my chief that Mr. Max Rissler is one of us, isn't it so. Give us your hand, my boy. We shall work together capitally I'm sure."

"If I give you anything," I made answer, "it will be the toe of my boot, and for once in my life I'd like to be a horse instead of a man, so that the foot with which to kick your coward's carcass be shod with hard iron instead of with shoe leather. Go back to your scoundrel of a chief, and say I'll

see him drawn and quartered before I'll take a farthing of his blood-money. I'm inclined to think—not because you've said it, but from facts that have come to my knowledge during my own investigations—that no lasting harm is intended to the unfortunate ladies who have fallen into his clutches, but you can tell him from me that the man who wages war upon defenceless women is a coward, a miscreant, and a cur. But if the other man is a coward and a cur, it seems to me that the man who sells himself, to do the dirty work of a coward and a cur, is worse. To my mind he's an unspeakable jackal. From the moment I knew upon what errand you had come, I felt as if to have exchanged a civil word with you was a slur upon one's manhood. The only reason I did speak you fair and tolerate your hateful presence was because I hoped you'd let fall something that would give me a clue to hunt you down. But now I can ease my mind and clear the polluted air of this room by speaking out. A man like you—an educated man, a man with brains who can sell himself to such a job is, as I say, a jackal—a loathsome unspeakable leprous skunk of a jackal! You've dared to insult me by offering me your hand in friendship. If you've got a ha'porth of man's

blood left in you, you'll release me from my promise—for a promise is a promise, even when it's given to such scum as you—and will give me permission to leave this chair. Then you'll follow me to a quiet place in the forest, that I can take you to, where you shall have as much of my hand as I can plant with closed fist between the two eyes of you, after which I'll hold to my promise and let you skulk away to your hole unfollowed. If you're the better man of the two—though it's an insult to our sex to apply the name to you—I'll take my hiding without whimpering, and give you the start you've stipulated for, all the same. Come now! Show that you're not a coward, and let you and me settle our little difference as men should. It'll be a change to you to have an honest set-to with one of your own sex, after spending your time in playing jackal, and skulking about God's earth to pounce upon and carry off defenceless women."

The hatred in his face as I spoke, was a sight to see, and I was struck by a curious pulse-like contraction and dilation of the pupils of his eyes—a sign perhaps of intense mental excitement. For one moment there was a look on his face that made me hope he was minded to fight, and in that moment I knew why men murder.

To me in that moment it was as if he and I were the only two living souls left on God's earth. Every one else—father, mother, sister, brother or friend—was not only forgotten, but was clean wiped out from my memory. Where the thought of them had been, there was now only a blank in my brain. In the same way the stage of the world had suddenly narrowed down to one spot—the few square feet where he and I sat face to face, waiting to spring, each at the other's throat. All the instincts of the animal, all the lusts that fire a young man's blood, seemed to come together in my veins to feed one common flame—the savage bestial lust to slay. If only for the reason that wine is warm in the mouth, if only because food is sweet to the palate, because women are fair to look upon, because life is glad and dominant and strong —for all these reasons, if for no other, I lusted to beat and bash the life out of his hateful body that he might never taste of these joys again.

I sat there with the two fists of me tight clenched under the table, the two eyes of me fixed greedily upon the spot between his two eyes, where I meant to strike the first blow, all the blood in my veins singing with the fierce joy of coming battle.

CHAPTER III

MURDER IN THE MIRROR

BUT he funked it. The man knew that when we two had come to the grip, there would be no slackening until one of us had throttled or beaten the life out of the other, and being a coward at heart, as I am persuaded all such men as he must be, he funked it, and baulked me of the looked-for encounter. His one thought now seemed to be to leave my presence—and with despatch. Snatching up the letter—my letter—from the table, and without so much as a glance at it, he cast a baleful look, not at me, but in my direction, and slunk out of the room like the jackal that he was.

The door had barely closed behind him before I underwent a terrible mental reaction. The fellow was on his own confession a cowardly cur whom every one with an ounce of manhood in his making would itch to kick; but it was not to kick but to kill, that had been in my thoughts. Whence came this savage murderous impulse, this savage bestial lust to slay? Had

one, in his familiar daily-frequented room, chanced to look at his own reflection in a mirror, and seen the bloody eyes of Murder glare out at him from the glass, he could not have been more terrified that I was by this glimpse into a hitherto unopened chamber in my own soul. In my somewhat adventurous career I had met men whom I had hated; men whom it would have been a joy to hand over to justice; men out of whom—on account of their inhuman crimes—I should have counted it a service to humanity to crush the life. But never to the worst of them had I felt as wickedly as I had felt to this man, and so—if I had read the look in his eyes aright—was his feeling towards me. What relation he and I had borne to each other in previous incarnations, I knew not, but I felt instinctively that ours was an ancient enmity.

So abject was my sense of shame at the outburst to which I had given way, that I could scarcely compel interest even in the clue which I had been so fortunate as to secure. I opened it listlessly and saw at a glance that I had made a discovery of supreme importance, and when the next instant I heard a step outside the door, I knew that I must be prompt to act. If, as was likely, my late visitor had discovered his

loss and had returned to demand the paper, it was possible either that he was armed or that he was accompanied by an accomplice, in which case, should a struggle take place and I be overpowered, the document would inevitably be taken from me.

In a recess to my right I had fixed a number of shelves which formed my bookcase. As the walls were slightly damp, I had been careful to place these shelves half a foot away from the wall, so that there might be sufficient space behind to allow a current of air to circulate. The instant I heard footsteps in the passage I crumpled up the paper into a ball and tossed it so that it fell behind the books, where it would be out of sight and could not easily be recovered.

I was none too soon, for the next moment the door creaked on its hinges and looking up I saw that the muzzle of a pistol was thrust between the chink, and that a man's eye was squinting along the barrel so as to cover me to a nicety. My late visitor—for, as I expected, it was he—nudged the door open noiselessly with his knee, and crept softly inside, holding his body and right arm as stiffly as a stuffed figure, so as not to disturb his aim. Then with his left hand behind him he closed and locked the door, pocketing the key, and with bent knees shuffled across

the room to the table, the pistol levelled full at my breast meanwhile.

"I've forgotten something," he said, sitting down and looking at me wickedly.

"Yes," I said, "that's quite clear, for you refer, I suppose, to your manners. But you can't have left them here, for as a matter of fact you didn't bring them with you."

I could see that the quiet unconcern of my tone surprised him. Not many moments before, we had watched each other like confronting tigers thirsting each to be at the other's throat. We had looked the one into the other's eyes, and had known that what we saw there was murder. All this had happened but a moment ago, and the fury of hatred which was still on his face he had expected to see on mine, instead of which he found only apathetic contempt.

It may have been that he thought I was afraid—as indeed was the case—for the coward's face of him suddenly boldened. Had he known that it was of myself, not of him, that I was afraid, and that I had spoken him quietly lest an angry word should prove a spur in the side of my hate, he had perhaps chosen his own words more warily.

"Come! the paper—and quick about it!" he said hoarsely and with a horrible oath.

"Oh, certainly," I said. "I think I can oblige you."

As the day was dark and foggy, I had lighted my lamp, and with the *Daily Chronicle* propped against the lamp's pillar, had been, as the reader knows, acquainting myself with the morning's news when my visitor had arrived. This paper I now. handed to him with a bow. "I'm sorry it's not the *Police News*, which, as a chronicle of crime is, probably your own choice of reading," I said; "but you'll find an account of the latest villainy of that infamous miscreant who is responsible for these abductions. And there's an account, too, of a railway accident at St. Albans, where, as you'll see, one poor devil had his neck broken."

"I wish it had been yours, you——!" he said as a peculiarly devilish snarl-and-smile contortion passed over his face. But come, give me my letter. I'm not in a mood to stand nonsense."

"Thanks so much!" I laughed, still holding myself in. "What a relief it must be to you to know that your neck at least will never get broken in that way. It will be a hangman's job when it comes to it, and a dirty job at that for a decent hangman."

"Curse you!" he screamed, his eyes blazing with fury. "Do you want to drive

me to murder? I've never seen the man I'd so readily swing for as you, and sir! if you give me any more of your lip, I'll blow your brains out where you sit."

"Yes," I said, "I should think you're the sort of warrior whose valour is reserved for unarmed men and defenceless women. When we'd nothing but our fists between us just now, and the fight—if we had come to it—would have been a fair one, you had to listen to a lot of my 'lip,' as you call it, and never lifted as much as a finger against the man who'd dubbed you a coward and a cur. You said a while ago that you liked my cigars. Let me bring a brand of tobacco to your notice—the 'Craven' mixture! It ought to suit your palate to a T."

What I must now record goes not a little against the grain of my vanity to set down, for it is pleasant to know that one is seen to advantage, even if it be only in print.

"Coward" and "cur" are bold words in the mouth of one who finds himself, as I did, at the wrong end of a pistol, and if this chapter had closed here, it is possible that my manhood had bulked bravely in the eyes of the reader. But the truth must be told, and that truth is that the taunt had scarcely left my lips before the heart of me was down into my boots, and it was myself who was

most eligible for the particular brand of tobacco I had recommended. When the fellow re-entered the room, I had seen at a glance, that the pistol he held was my own. To mistake it were impossible, for it was one of a pair of old fashioned, flint-lock, muzzle-loaders which I had picked up at a sale to hang with other trophies in my tiny hall. My brother had called to spend the preceding afternoon with me and I had taken these pistols from their brackets to explain the mechanism. As they were clean, and in excellent working order, I had got out my powder flask and some bullets and for want of something better to do, he and I had amused ourselves by popping at a row of bottles which we had slung upon a string. When we wearied of the occupation, and a walk was proposed, I had been careful to empty the charge of my pistol into the air, and enjoining my brother to do the same, I had gone into the house in search of a hat, placing my unloaded pistol upon the table near the hat rack.

There it had lain all the night, and there no doubt my visitor had found it on re-entering the cottage. Being unprovided with a weapon of his own, he had, I suppose, snatched it up, when he returned to demand the surrender of his document.

That the fellow's hatred of me was so intense that he would have shot me without compunction where I sat, and have taken a savage pleasure in the blood-letting, I was aware; and but for the fact that I knew the pistol to be unloaded, it is possible I had spoken him more civilly.

But as I flung in his face the gibe about his being a possible appreciator of that blend of tobacco known as "Craven Mixture," I saw that his eyes had fallen, and were fixed uneasily upon the pistol he was holding.

In threatening to blow out my brains he had advanced the weapon so unpleasantly near to my nose that it came well within the light of the lamp, and I could see by his face that he was asking himself what sort of a weapon it was of which he had got hold, and whether, in the event of his firing, it would not be likely to burst and do him more of a mischief than it did to me.

Naturally my eyes followed his, and I too, had cause for dismay, for I knew by the plug of paper which was to be seen within the barrel that the thing was loaded and that I was in dire and imminent peril.

I remember that the realization of the fact that the pistol was loaded, set up half a dozen different actions in my brain. One of the receiving clerks, if I may so call them, who sat

at that busy telegraphic centre was saying—

"Loaded, by George! Here's a pretty mess! Now how on earth am I going to get out of this scrape? There must be some way out, and, hang it, I've got to find that way, and quickly too!"

Clerk No. 2 was busy anathematizing somebody else. "Oh yes!" he said with angry resentment. "That young brother of mine again! I've always said his infernal carelessness would be the death of somebody one day, but I didn't expect that I should be the victim. And I begged him so particularly to see that the pistol was unloaded before he brought it into the house!"

Number 3 was improving the occasion by preaching me a sermon. "Serves you right, my boy!" he was saying. "If you hadn't used such big words on an empty stomach, you wouldn't have got yourself into this pickle. You think a mighty lot of yourself because you happen to know how to use your fists, and you're ready to call every man of your fighting weight a coward because he doesn't care to put up his own fists at a minute's notice. But calling names is poor fun for a sportsman. Who is the coward now? Why you look sicker than a lubberly landsman in a Bay of Biscay storm and all at the sight of an antiquated flint-lock pistol

in the grip of a bigger coward than yourself."

Clerk No. 3 was quite right. I felt, and no doubt looked, as "sick" as he said, and was not a little ashamed of myself into the bargain. Of my visitor himself I can truly say I stood—albeit I was sitting—in no fear. At the good old game of fisticuffs I can acquit myself creditably, and I have yet to meet the man with whom I should hesitate to try a "fall"

But for loaded firearms as nosegays I must confess I have no liking. Once before in my life I had had that sort of posy thrust beneath my nostrils that I might acquaint myself with its odour, and though there be worse scents than the smell of burnt powder, it is a perfume which is best appreciated when not inconveniently near. Had the eyes of the man who held the pistol been upon mine, immediately after I had called him "coward" and "cur," he would have seen that my looks belied my words. Fortunately for me, his eyes were, as I have said, fixed upon the pistol which he was now holding as gingerly as if it had been fashioned of sugar-stick; and the look of consternation upon his face was so comical that but for the gravity of the situation I should have laughed outright. It was, however, no laughing matter, for I knew, if he did not, that the pistol was trustworthy,

and that, should he elect to fire, my title to a kingdom in the skies must shortly come up for consideration.

Then he suddenly stared me in the face again, and though I made haste to don my mask of indifference I could not school my traitor eyes to the calmness that I was far from feeling. He was no fool, and what he saw there put new life into him.

"Ah—ha!" he said, with a devilish grin. "So the odd trick's mine after all, is it! You've shown your hand too plainly, my friend. I had my doubts about this pop-gun of yours, but I see that you recognize it, and know that it is good enough to do your business. I never thought to kill you when I came here, but you know too much to make it safe for the pair of us to be alive together. And I'm a jackal, am I, a cowardly cur and a jackal! Who's the coward now, eh? You can't deceive me, you white-livered thief-catcher. You've got to die, to die, to die, and you're afraid, curse you. You're afraid and you know it!"

His voice broke with the last words and shrilled into a scream. The fact was that though he longed to let the life out of me, he couldn't screw his courage up to the sticking point, and just as some of his kidney seek Dutch courage in drink, so he was doing his

best to lash himself into a passion, by the adventitious aid of which he trusted to be nerved to do the deed. About the final issue, I entertained no false hope. The man had it in his power to murder me, and murder me he would, without the shadow of a doubt. The memory of my taunts was working like strong drink within him, and I saw that another ten seconds would decide my fate.



"The man had it in his power to murder me, and murder me he would, without a shadow of a doubt."

The Jackal] [*Page* 16

CHAPTER IV

I LOOK DEATH IN THE FACE

WITH the calmness of despair I leant back in my chair and reviewed the situation. In that moment I took a mental inventory of every object in the room. The pistol in his hand; the miniature poker, no thicker than a toasting-fork, that stood in the grate; the breakfast things and blunt-headed knives that lay upon the table; the books upon the shelves; the pictures upon the wall; the bicycle pump in the corner—these, and, in brief, nearly everything else that was contained within the four walls of the room, passed before me in a procession that came and went like a lightning flash, if haply there might be something to serve my turn; something to delay, if not to divert, the fate that fronted me.

That second's consideration saved my life. Before the other second had ticked away upon the clock, I had snatched up the milk jug from the table, and dashed the contents full upon the pistol's flash-pan and stock.

As I did so the fellow pulled the trigger,

but the touch hole was already as wet with milk as the pinched nipple of a cow's udder, and the spark caused by the fall of the flint failed to explode the charge.

We were on equal terms again—man to man, and each of us unarmed. With a savage cry of joy I sprang to my feet, my clenched fist doubled up to my shoulder, and all the muscles of my arm as tense and rigid for the blow as the pulled gutta-percha of a schoolboy's catapault.

He leapt back with a whimper like that of a dog who sees the uplifted lash in his master's hand.

" Your promise ! your promise ! " he bleated (I was going to say " blubbered "). " You've sworn on the Testament not to leave that chair for thirty minutes after I've left the room, and I know you won't go back upon your word. Remember that I've trusted you—trusted you, Mr. Rissler—and I can't believe you'd play me false."

" You infernal ruffian ! " I said. " When I promised you not to leave this chair, it wasn't in the bargain that I was to sit here while you butchered me in cold blood. But a promise is a promise, even when it's given to a miscreant like you, so I suppose I must keep it."

He looked half satisfied only. To a man

of his code of honour, or dishonour, it was perhaps incredible that there could be found in the world any one so quixotic as to have scruples about breaking a pledge—unless with a sinister motive.

"The thirty minutes will begin at the moment I leave this room?" he queried suspiciously. "You're not counting from the time I first left, are you?"

"Look here!" I said. "I've given you a promise, and I'm going to keep it as a man of honour should. But the condition under which that promise was made I decline to re-consider or to discuss."

As a matter of fact, the fellow's cunning had hit the nail upon the head. It was twenty-nine minutes past nine when he had first left the room. As it was now twenty-five minutes to ten, his time of probation had another twenty-four minutes to run. The pound of flesh I had promised him, he should have—just that, and nothing more. I had taken an oath not to leave my chair within a certain time, and but for the fact that he could easily have made his escape by the window, I should have felt that I was keeping within the letter of the law had I moved myself and the chair, snailwise, to the door, so that I could lay hands upon him as he passed out.

Now my policy must be by some means to detain him.

"So you'll have to leave without your paper after all," I added aloud.

He rose to the bait.

"Mr. Rissler," he said impressively, "I don't think you have realized how terrible is the risk you run, and how powerful are the resources at my principal's command. If I leave this room without that paper, you're a dead man in two days. No earthly power—police, friends, your own courage or cunning—and I admit you have both—can save you. Give me back that paper, and no harm shall come to you—that I swear. You said I meant to shoot you. I didn't. I only wanted to scare you into giving me my own property. If I had come here meaning to murder, should I have been such an utter fool as to come unarmed? Be fair to me, Mr. Rissler, and admit that that's so. You can see for yourself that it is so—can't you? No man who meant mischief would have trusted you, and come here defenceless as I came. If I'd thought——"

"If you'd thought there was going to be a tussle, and that you'd be called upon to stand up for yourself like a man, you'd have taken confounded good care to have put your assassin's knife or a Colt's revolver in your

pocket, you scoundrel," I interrupted. "Is that what you mean, eh?"

"No," he replied emphatically. "It isn't. I came here unarmed because I had no thought of any unpleasantness, because I knew you were an honourable man, as I admit I've found you to be, a man——"

"That'll do!" I put in, cutting him short. "I'm not in need of a testimonial from you. Listen to me. I've turned detective, not, as you apparently think, to make money, but for the sheer fun of it all, and because I'd die of an inactive life; because I have a craving after excitement, sensation, striking situations and dramatic effect. It's in human nature to crave that sort of thing, and a good many people gratify it by going to the theatre or by novel-reading. Some of us prefer real life to the theatre or to the novel, and that's why we turn soldier, sailor, hunter, detective—perhaps even thief. Well, as you've said, I'm by way of being a novelist, as well as a 'nark' (isn't that the word for a policeman's understudy?), and as a novelist I've an eye for a 'scene.' Now, it seems to me that this little drama which you and I are working out together has developed into a very pretty and striking situation. Here am I, who have for months been hunting for a certain man—

yourself—whom I'm dead set on handing over to justice. And now that I've found you at last, now that for the first time we are face to face and my waited-for chance has come, I'm bound to sit here twiddling my thumbs, and see you walk away unmolested, and with such a start that the chances are I may never catch you up again.

"That's situation No. 1.

"And here are you, knowing that every minute you linger in this room puts me hot upon your track and brings you nearer to penal servitude, or—for I can well believe that there are worse things against you than abduction—it may even be to the hangman. And yet you can't make up your mind to go away, because you know that I've got a certain document in my possession that you daren't leave the room without trying to get back. And you haven't many minutes left to do it either!

"That's situation No. 2.

"Now look here. This thing interests me. It reminds me of a game of 'cat and mouse,' when the cat doesn't mind giving the mouse a bit of a chance, so as not to spoil the fun too quickly. If you were man enough to do it, you'd come and take that document from me by sheer force. But you're not. Well, I'm going to make you a sporting offer.

That document is in this room, but it is not in my possession. It's not even within my reach. I'll pledge you my word of honour that's so. But it *is* in a place where it is quite possible for you to find it.

"What will you do? Go away and make sure of your escape now, with the knowledge that by means of that document I shall in a very short time, and to a certainty, run you to earth, and hand you over to the police? Or will you take your chance of stopping to find the letter, in which case, unless you're very quick about it, I shall be on your track as sure as nails, and shall lodge you safely in a police cell, very likely before you're half an hour older? You've got seventeen minutes clear to find the thing and to get away. Perhaps you can do it in that time. Anyhow there's a very good chance. Perhaps you can't, and personally I rather fancy it will turn out that way. Now, which is it to be? As I say, this thing interests me. It's a bit of a gamble, I know, and I shall be very curious to see which way you decide."

The man was fairly bewildered, and no wonder. That all I had said about "novelists and detectives," "scenes and situations," was trash and nonsense, the reader will readily surmise. It was the first thing that came into my head to say, and its only pur-

pose was to keep him there, but there was just enough sense in the nonsense, just enough plausibility in the truck, to make the man uncertain whether or not I was to be taken seriously. In the meantime the thirty minutes were fast slipping away, and every moment gone was a moment gained. Come to a decision he could not, for I had him fairly on the horns of a dilemma. When he saw by the clock that he had only fifteen minutes left to make his escape, an unreasoning panic seized him, and he bolted at break-neck speed for the door. There he halted irresolutely, remembering, it may be, that by leaving the paper in my possession, he was in effect snapping the handcuffs upon his own wrists; or perhaps realizing that to return to his principal and report: firstly that he had failed in his errand, and, secondly, that he had left, in an enemy's hand, a clue which would bring both principal and agent to justice, might not only call down upon him a terrible vengeance, but might result in the loss of an enormously remunerative post.

"You swear that the letter is in this room, and is not on your person—that it's not even near your person?" he inquired.

"I swear," I replied.

"Then I'll stay and look for it," he said with sudden desperate determination.

"So glad," I made answer derisively. "I shall enjoy it hugely. There's nothing I like better than to watch other people work. Dear me! what an energetic man you are, to be sure. How you do bustle around! It makes one's head ache! You don't mind my smoking, do you? 'Pon my word, you are getting quite 'warm,' as the children say when they play at hide and seek. Oh! now you're getting cold again; point of fact, you're freezing. That's better. Warmer! Still warmer! You'll burn yourself if you don't mind. But how time does go! I don't want to hurry you, but really——"

"For heaven's sake cut the cackle!" he snapped with evident exasperation. "You distract me so with your slack-jaw that I can't look for what I want—much less think. It isn't playing the game fair. It isn't, really."

"Sorry!" I said suavely, turning my chair round so as not to give him an opportunity of taking me from behind, for I knew perfectly well what was in his mind.

Even a coward is dangerous when he is desperate and at bay, as this man was, and rather than go without his precious paper he was prepared to fight. But not to fight fairly. When he had decided to accept my challenge and to make a search for the lost letter, I

had seen that he turned the edge of an eye to a white metal "T" piece that lay under a sofa near the window. If he could find the letter in time to make good his escape, I knew that he would do so. But it was not his intention to let the sands of his allotted time run out to find him on his knees ransacking my effects; and I knew that in the last extremity he would use the heavy metal "T" piece as a weapon against myself. A visitor (that confounded young brother of mine again!) had brought it in from the tool shed the day before, to see if he could fit it to his bicycle. Instead of returning it whence it came, when he found it would not serve his purpose, the lazy young rascal, whom even in that moment of anxiety I did not forget to anathematize, had carelessly flung it where it now lay.

This "T" piece, the man on the floor took up, as if to examine. "I've heard of letters being concealed in gun barrels and bicycle tubes," he said aloud, hoping to put me off my guard, "and, by heaven! I believe there is a paper in this. I'm going to win this game of hide and seek, after all, I think."

He got upon his feet, and, grasping the thing hammerwise, raised it over his head as if to squint up the tube. With a gruff "come out!" he shook it, as if to dislodge

an imaginary letter, and then, when he had poised it to his liking, he suddenly struck savagely, and with all his strength, at my head.

Had I been unprepared, the thing must have crushed into my skull, for the fact that he was standing and I sitting, put me at serious disadvantage. But I dodged aside, and as his arm swung down within grasp of mine, I clutched at it and jerked him violently towards me. I had sworn not to leave my chair, nor to follow him within the proscribed time, but there was nothing in my bond to hinder me from laying detaining hands upon him should he give me the opportunity to do so. Again he raised the "T" piece to strike, but I let out with my right foot, catching him so fairly in the stomach that he squealed, and then, lest he should wriggle out of my reach, I jerked him towards me again, striking him in the face with my fist. The two of us reeled against the table, overturning it, and going down—I under and he above—with a crash. As I went backward I clutched at his beard. It came off in my hand, and I saw that his face was shaven, and that my gentle visitor was no other than Mr. Inspector Norman who had held the Marquis of Southborne in conversation at St. Pancras Station.

CHAPTER V

RED HOT UPON THE TRAIL

YES, the man with whom I had been so anxious to try conclusions proved to be no other than Inspector Norman. When he and I went down together, "rider and horse, friend, foe, in one red burial blent," I came off considerably worse than he—firstly, because being "bottom dog" I acted as a sort of buffer whereby to break the force of his fall, and secondly, because the back of my head came into such violent contact with an iron fender kerb that the sense was knocked out of me. How long I lay stunned I do not know, but my next recollection is that of awakening as if from sleep with the consciousness of "something burning." I was also conscious of a splitting headache, and on opening my eyes I found myself lying on my back in my own garden—a little knot of neighbours and other folk standing by. Two of them were apparently engaged in trying to "bring me round." The rest were looking at the blazing ruins of what had once been my

cottage. Whether the accident had been caused by the overturning of the table, on which a lighted paraffin lamp had been standing, or whether Inspector Norman, on seeing that I was stunned, had deliberately fired the place in the hope that I and the lost document might be consumed together, I cannot say. All I know is that a passing labourer, seeing flames bursting from the thatched roof of my cottage, had rushed into the building, and finding me lying insensible on the floor had carried me out.

The destruction of the little cottage did not greatly trouble me. It was insured, and contained nothing which I could not replace; but the thought of losing the letter which I had run such risks to acquire—the letter by means of which I was to unmask the principal of this infamous conspiracy—was so maddening, that dazed and weak as I was, I staggered to my feet with the intention of re-entering the cottage in search of the precious document. This, the bystanders by force prevented me from doing, and even had it not been so, I must have failed in the mission, for already the place was practically gutted.

Letter or no letter, I was determined to devote myself to the hunting down of Norman, and that very day saw me make something in the nature of a start. I had three clues

upon which to work, but first of all I must endeavour to get upon the track of Lady Southborne. The other clues could wait. That concerned with her abduction could not. It was only upon the preceding evening that the abduction had taken place, and could I, while the scent was warm, get upon the heels of those who had carried her off, my chances of success would be materially increased. Two trains had left St. Pancras Station about the time of her disappearance —the Manchester mail and the 6.30 for Southend. Norman had managed to make Lord Southborne and the station master believe that the abducted lady must be looked for in the former. To me it was now quite clear that the train about which I must make inquiries was the latter. From that train Norman had clearly been anxious to divert attention, for he had told his auditors that he had himself kept an eye upon the passengers, and was positive that Lady Southborne was not among them.

Clearly my first duty was to make the most searching inquiries, at every station upon the line, concerning the passengers who had travelled by that train on the preceding evening. My opinion of Norman was that he was one of those very clever men whose confidence in their own cleverness is sometimes the cause

of their downfall. I thought it very probable that his theory about the pretext under which Lady Southborne had been decoyed into entering the Manchester mail, was not far from the truth, except for the fact that it was the Southend train, not the Manchester mail, which she had been persuaded to enter. If, as Lord Southborne had said, it was no uncommon occurrence for him to put his wife into a non-smoking compartment while he travelled part of the way in a smoker, Norman was in all probability aware of the fact, and would not hesitate to make use of it.

The details of my investigation may be spared the reader. Starting from St. Pancras, I took separately every station on the line, and interviewed every official who had been on duty on the evening of the abduction. Station after station was "worked," but without result, and I was beginning to get disheartened, until I came to Barking, where I struck the trail red-hot. The very first porter to whom I put the question, "Had he noticed, among the passengers by the 6.30 train from St. Pancras on the preceding evening, a lady, dressed in mourning and wearing an astrachan jacket and a big hat," answered without a moment's hesitation, "Yes, sir; I did."

"What do you remember about her?" I asked.

"Well, it was this way, sir," he replied. "When the train comes in, I see a young man jump out in a hurry and go up to a first-class carriage where the lady was sitting. He touched his hat and asked her something, and I heard her say, 'Yes, that's my name. What is it?' Then he gave her a paper of some sort and walked away. I see her open it and read it, and then she says, 'How careless of him! It's really too tiresome!' and crumples up the paper in her hand and chucks it out of the window like as if she was cross."

"Yes," I said, "what happened then?"

"Well, she got out of the train, and she says to me, 'Porter,' she says, 'just take my rug and bag and put me in a first-class carriage in the train for Tilbury, and see no one else gets in, will you?'"

"Yes?" I said anxiously, "what then?"

"Then I done it, and she says—same as you might, you know, sir—she says, 'That'll do, porter. Here's half a crown for you. Don't let anybody else get in.'"

After I had taken my friend the porter's hint and a similar coin had changed hands, I said—

"Yes. Anything else happen?"

"Oh! then she went on to Tilbury, same as the telegram told her," he answered.

"How do you know that it was a telegram and what was in it?" I queried.

"'Cos I picked it up and read it after she was gone," was the reply. "If you think it's worth another half crown to you, I don't know as I couldn't find it."

I did think so, and found it accordingly was in a pocket of his corduroy sleeved-waistcoat. The pretended telegram was written in pencil upon one of the railway company's forms, and ran as follows—

"So sorry. Missed train at St. Pancras. Go on by yourself to Tilbury, and go straight on board to Arthur. I shall take cab to Fenchurch and come by other line, arriving soon after you. Am sending this on railway company's private wire by courtesy of station master at St. Pancras.

"EDGAR."

That I was on the right track there could be no doubt. "Edgar" was Lord Southborne's Christian name, and Lady Southborne's brother was, as I had ascertained, called Arthur. I had all along felt sure that the abduction had been carried out by trickery; and a very systematic piece of trickery it was that arranged beforehand for a forged telegram written upon paper that had been stolen, either from the company's office or from the company's stationers, and

delivered to the Marchioness by an accomplice on the arrival of the train at Barking. Small wonder that the victim of all this villainy had fallen unsuspectingly into the trap that had been set for her. About the way the rest of the programme had been carried out, I had a very shrewd suspicion. The ship in which Lady Southborne's brother was sailing had left the wharf the afternoon before the abduction, and was lying off Tilbury in readiness to make a start on the flood tide in the morning.

On her arrival at Tilbury or Tilbury Docks Station the Marchioness had very probably been accosted by one of Norman's accomplices.

"Want to go aboard the liner, lady? Here yer are! There's a boat just putting off for her, if you'll come this way."

Some persons of Lady Southborne's position—and, indeed, not a few of a very much inferior position to hers—would, under such circumstances, have asked to see the station-master, informing him who they were and upon what errand they had come. But the Marchioness was everywhere known to be of a singularly independent and fearless nature. Coming as she did of one of the oldest families in England, she was by no means ashamed of the fact that in her early youth she had

been acquainted with straitened circumstances, and had been sometimes compelled to shift for herself. A certain Royal personage is reported to have said of her that she was "The handsomest woman in England—and the best bred—with no confounded nonsense about her."

The chances were, therefore, that she would accept the escort of the first waterman who offered his services, and would, quite unsuspectingly, take her seat in the boat, to be rowed out, as she supposed, to join her brother on the liner. Once in the boat and away from land, one of the ruffians may suddenly have thrown a shawl over her head to prevent her cries from being heard, and then have conveyed her—not to the liner, but to some other vessel which was lying in readiness. I had all along thought it very likely that the victims of the abduction conspiracy had been smuggled out of England by means of a private yacht, and thus far it looked as if my theory were about to receive confirmation.

While I was endeavouring—unsuccessfully—to obtain from my friend the porter a description of the man who had handed Lady Southborne the pretended telegram, a train puffed into the station.

"What train is this?" I asked.

"The Tilbury train, sir," he answered; "same one as the lady you was asking about travelled by. I'll have to be off, as I'm in charge of the platform."

For some reason this particular train happened on this particular evening to be very full. Except for one first-class smoking compartment labelled "Reserved," and with only a single occupant, there was apparently no room anywhere. Opposite this compartment halted a little wizened man who had been frantically rushing from carriage to carriage in the hope of finding a seat.

"Excuse me, sir," he said civilly to this occupant; "I see your compartment is marked 'Reserved,' and I should be very sorry to intrude, but you'd do me a very great kindness if you'd allow me to get in. I'm only going as far as the next station, and I'm very anxious to get home as my little girl's ill."

"No; you can't come in here," said the other, who, I could see, was a big man. "Find a seat somewhere else."

"But I can't find a seat anywhere else," expostulated the little man. "They're all full up."

"Then stand—and be hanged to you!" was the reply.

"I'd stand willingly. I'd stand in your carriage if you'd allow me. But they won't

let me into any of the other carriages. They held the door, and I'm sorry to say I'm not strong enough to open it by force—I wish I were."

"Oh, well! you can't come in here, and that's the long and the short of it! I've paid to reserve this carriage, and I mean to keep it!" said the big man churlishly, leaning back in his seat as if to imply that the case did not admit of discussion.

For answer the little man seized the handle, turned it, and, opening the door, was about to enter, *nolens volens*, for already the word "Right away!" had been passed along, the light flashed, and the answering whistle given.

With an oath the big man pushed him back, slamming the door violently. Still pleading, the little man stood on the step as the train began to move along the platform. "Won't you let me in, sir?" he begged. "I'm anxious to get home."

"No; go away, confound you!" roared the other.

The train was now beginning to move at some speed; and the carriage, on the step of which the little man was perched, came opposite to where I stood.

"Then take that, you ugly lout!" he said. As he spoke he leant through the window, and with his open hand he smacked the big fellow

across the " chops " (it's not a nice word, but I must use it) with such force that the fellow's face must have smarted for many a day. To the onlooker it was an instructive object-lesson in the retribution that, occasionally, awaits the bully and the churl. It demonstrated that when a weak body is backed by a quick brain, the victory is not always to the strong. It was the triumph of strategy over size. Had the little man not timed matters to a nicety, he might have had cause to pay dearly for his temerity. A moment later and he could not safely have descended from the step; a moment earlier and it had been possible for the big man to spring out and exact a terrible revenge. But done as it was the little man's manner of retaliation was nothing less than a work of art. For an instant the passenger's hand was on the door handle, but to have got out would have meant missing the train as well as running some risk, and there was nothing left but to threaten condign punishment at a future date.

" I'll know you again," he shouted, thrusting a face purple with passion out of the window and impotently brandishing his fist; " I'll know you again, and by heaven, when next I come across you, I'll pound the life out of you for this ! "

The little man smiled back at him derisively.

"Ta-ta, Percy! Love to 'em all at home," he jeered. I saw the smile and heard the words, but scarcely heeded them, for, looking at the flushed face protruding from the carriage window, I recognized my ancient enemy, Inspector Norman.

CHAPTER VI

THE FLABBERGASTED FUNK OF MR. NORMAN

THERE is a proverb which enjoins us to "Tell the truth and shame the devil." On the occasions when I have made an exception in favour of the truth, I have generally succeeded in putting no one but myself to shame. Already in this narrative I have had to write myself down a coward. Now I am under the painful necessity of admitting that I acted like a fool. Let any reader of intelligence ask himself what I ought to have done when I realized that the big man in the reserved smoking compartment was Inspector Norman, and I will go bail for the answer. That answer would most assuredly be: "If you are a very active man, and used to entering a train in motion, you should have done your best to get in, choosing of course any carriage but that in which Norman was seated. If you thought he had observed you, you should have kept a very close watch upon him to prevent his leaving the train to make his escape. If you had reason to believe you

were unobserved, you should have waited for him to alight. Then you should have shadowed him to his destination, when it is possible, even probable, that you would have discovered the hiding-place to which Lady Southborne had been taken, and so would have been the means of rescuing her from captivity and of bringing her abductors to justice.

"If, on the other hand, you thought it impossible to enter the train, you should have lost no time in communicating with the station master, and in persuading him to telegraph to the first stopping place, giving instructions for Norman's arrest."

Precisely. That is what any sane person, with an ounce of "gumption" in his making, would under such circumstances have done.

I blush to say I did nothing of the sort. The instant I realized that the fellow in the first-class compartment was Inspector Norman I "sprinted" after that carriage in a style that would have put to shame the best and most boasted performance of my public school days. Norman's head was withdrawn almost as soon as I recognized him, and when I reached the compartment he was staring out of the opposite window. Hence it happened that I had twisted the handle, jerked open the door, and taken a flying leap—as

if from a trapeze—into the centre of the compartment before he had time to look round.

When he did look round, and found into whose company he had fallen, or rather who had fallen into his company, the flabbergasted funk—if I may thus inelegantly style it—on his face was a sight to see. He gave utterance to a little scream of terror, almost like a woman's, and then leapt up frantically to grab at the communication cord as if to stop the train. Whether the communication were outside the carriage, and the window being up, Norman was unable to reach it, or whether the cord had so recently been cut as not yet to have been replaced, I cannot say, but certain it is that his hand found no cord to pull. As he huddled, still standing, away from me, with his white face ducking behind the arm he had raised to protect it, and his mouth dropt open in the abjectness of his terror, he was not a pretty sight upon which to look.

"Sit down, you fool," I said. "I'm not going to strike you. I see you've got the mark of that little man's fist on your face yet, and served you right too for your dog-in-the-mangerish selfishness and incivility. However, it's just as well it happened as it did, as but for that little episode I should very likely never have noticed you, and so might

have missed the unexpected pleasure of this meeting."

Reassured to find that there was no immediate probability of assault and battery, he became a little bolder in his bearing, and sitting down as I had commanded, he answered me civilly.

" I'm sure it's not by any wish of mine that there's been any unpleasantness between us, Mr. Rissler," he said. " I did let my tongue run away with me and say some rude things to you yesterday about your detective work and your stories. But, to tell the honest truth, I was a bit jealous of you. You see, this job's been a little gold mine to me, and I didn't fancy playing second fiddle to somebody else after having the entire management so long. When I found that my chief was dead set on securing you, I decided to ride the high horse with you, so as to force you into taking the second place. One's got to begin as one means to go on. It's a question of discipline, and I thought if I spoke you pretty sharp at first, and asserted my authority, you might think I was the better man of the two, and would be content to work under me as I'd hoped."

I am not generally esteemed to be a man of a biting tongue, but something there was in this fellow which called up such ungovernable

hatred within me that my manner of flinging my words at him was, I fear, like the throwing of vitriol in the face.

"I see," I answered savagely. "What you mean is that you're the kind of man who bullies the weak and cringes to the strong. That if one's fool enough to let you kick him, you'll kick him for all you're worth, to keep him in his place, but if he shows fight you'll knuckle under and cringe to him to prevent his kicking you. From one point of view I am not sure that you're not right. The world takes a man very much at his own valuation, but bullying doesn't always pay, as witness that red mark on your face where the little fellow struck you."

As I spoke the train drew up at Rainham Station, and I held myself in readiness for Norman's next move. My own line of action must, I had already decided, be determined by his. Should he attempt to alight, it would be my business to bear him company. Should he elect to go on to Tilbury, that place would suit my purpose equally well. He, however, sat scowling in his corner without budging, and so deep in thought that when first one passenger and then another looked in at the window and, apparently not noticing the board inscribed "Reserved," entered to possess himself of the coveted seat in the

corner, Norman did not put himself to the trouble of asking either to go elsewhere. It was possible, I thought, that he considered the presence of strangers was his best guarantee against assault.

There were now four of us in the carriage—Norman and myself, each with a stranger opposite.

When the train was well on its way to the next station, the man facing Norman touched him on the knee, and jerking a thumb in my direction said gruffly—

"Friend of yours? He was talking to you, wasn't he, when I got in?"

"Friend!" answered Norman savagely. "Yes, you can guess how much of a friend of mine he is when I tell you his name. This, my boy, is Mr. Max Rissler, detective and novelist."

"What!" shouted the other. "The man who's on our track? The fellow who's got that letter? Great Jimminy! what's he doing here?"

As he spoke he rose to his feet, shaking himself like a huge dog, and scanning me from head to foot as one prize fighter might scan another before an encounter. I was upon my feet in a jiffey, and quick to take his measure, but as I marked the massiveness of his build, and saw the malignant face of

Norman peering out behind him, I realized that my settlement with that worthy was not to be the "walk over" which I had expected.

"That's the man," hissed Norman over the other's shoulder. "Kill him, Bill! Kill him! Here's my revolver. It's loaded in all the chambers. With that letter—and he's got it on him now—he can get every one of us into gaol. Kill him and be quick about it, for he's tricky as the devil, and if you give him half a chance he'll do us yet, and get away. Here's the pistol. Take it now! Take it. Why the devil don't you take it and shoot?"

"Because when I signed on with you, murder wasn't on the papers," answered the man whom Norman called Bill. "I'm not too fond of the business we're in as it is, but when rich people have a whim, and can afford to pay for it at the price we're being paid, it doesn't do for the poor folk they employ to be too particular. But when it comes to murder, I'm not taking any, thank you. If you've got a private quarrel with this man, settle it with him yourself, but don't ask me to do your dirty work by shooting him."

Twice while Bill had been speaking Norman had essayed to raise the arm that held the pistol, but his hand was as unsteady as the needle in a shaken compass, and he let the

weapon drop by his side again. Then his arm fluttered up for a third attempt, and this time I believe he meant to make an end of me, but before he could take aim, the man called Bill, who had been watching him closely, snatched suddenly at the revolver, and, with an exclamation of disgust, tossed it through the window.

"Mutiny or no mutiny, I'm not going to stand by and see murder done," he said. "Are you mad? This man has got a letter that it won't do to leave in his possession. Well, we're going to take it—and that without asking his leave. And he's come here spying on us, and has thrust himself into our company without being asked. We've got business to do to-night, and we're going to fix him up so that he can't interfere with us—and that, too, will be done without his being asked. The worst harm we need do him is a little inconvenience. A gag in his mouth and a bit of cord round his hands and feet are all we need. First of all we'll put him on his back. That'll be easy enough with such odds. Come along. Are you ready?"

Meanwhile the fourth occupant of the compartment, who was opposite to me, had sat staring excitedly—as well he might—at the three of us.

"Thank my stars!" I said to myself,

"that I am not alone with this precious pair!"

Then, without taking my eyes from my two antagonists, I half turned to passenger Number Four.

"Will you stand by me, sir?" I said. "These men are criminals—the abductors of Lady Southborne—and I'm going to hand them over to the police."

"Aye, aye! I'm with you," he answered, rising and standing behind me.

The man called Bill, stooping wrestler-wise, with his left foot and left shoulder thrown forward, and with fingers splayed open before him, ready for the grip, was now advancing a step at a time, watching warily to close with me for a "throw." I made pretence to fall into the same attitude, but my intention was not to wrestle, but to "weigh in" if I could with a "knock-out" blow. If he and I closed with each other, and we swayed for a moment with interlocked arms before going down, Norman might take the opportunity to strike at my unprotected head and possibly to knock me senseless, whereas if, when Bill rushed in to close, I changed my tactics, and instead of being a wrestler on the defensive became suddenly a pugilist trying to get in a blow, I might take him by surprise and disable one of my antagonists right off.

I might have spared myself the pains. As I stood there—alert as a runner toeing the line ere the word "Go!"—an arm was thrown around my neck from behind, and the next moment I was borne backward, half strangled, upon the floor.

CHAPTER VII

HOW NORMAN AND CO. MADE A MUMMY OF ME

I HAD not been overpowered thus easily but for the fact that the assault came from what I had supposed to be a part of my own garrison. The garotter was, of course, the man behind me, passenger Number Four. I had assumed him to be a chance traveller whose reason for entering the compartment was that he saw a corner seat vacant. Your average Englishman is not only on the side of law and order, but is also a stickler for fair play, and when I had appealed to my fellow-passenger to assist me in a conflict with two criminals whom otherwise I must have faced single-handed, and he had replied, "I'm with you," it had not occurred to me to suspect treachery on his part. It was now only too clear that he was a confederate of Norman's. I had thought it strange that the last-mentioned worthy should wish to reserve a carriage all to himself, but when he made the necessary arrange-

ment with the guard or the station master he had no doubt been aware that his accomplices would join him at Rainham. Now his looked-for reinforcements had arrived; and as I lay there with Norman kneeling none too gingerly on my chest, while Passenger Number Four kneaded the stray ends of an over-large handkerchief into my mouth (like an economical housewife filling up the spare spaces in a dumpling with her last bit of dough), and the man called Bill lashed my feet and legs together with a woollen scarf, miscalled a "comforter,"—while all this was happening I had cause to feel that so far as that night's work was concerned, the feather was not precisely in my cap. If I had no feather in my cap, I had at least, however, a crumb of consolation in my mouth. Norman's dismay, on discovering that the letter was not upon my person, was to me a sugared morsel to turn and re-turn upon the tongue, like the sucked sweetmeat with which a schoolboy solaces himself as he stands whimpering in the corner after a caning.

They turned out my pockets; they ripped open my clothes, lest the letter lay concealed in the lining; they searched under the leather of my hat, and even satisfied themselves that there were no hollow heels or false soles to my boots. I was not a pretty

object when they had done with me, for they supplemented the handkerchief that was halfway down my throat by another handkerchief, bound tightly over my nostrils and mouth.

Then they tore some of my clothes into strips, and swathed me round about so completely that for all the use my legs and arms were to me, I might have been either a flat fish or an Egyptian mummy. And, indeed, no newly landed flat fish could have been more helpless than I, for the only movement of which I was capable, resembled that of the flat fish when he curves his body bow-wise, and strives to regain his native element by a series of head-and-tail flops or jumps.

"That's what I call making a tidy job of a thing," said Passenger Number Four; "I reckon he won't play spy on us to-night. But what are we going to do with him now we've got him—send him to the Lord Mayor's show—eh, Bill?"

Bill was apparently quicker to see the humour of the situation than I was.

"Address him 'This side up; with care,' and send him parcel post to his best girl as a Christmas box," he suggested.

"Label him 'How authors work,' and send him to a magazine for an illustrated interview," chuckled the other.

This suggestion for adding a new terror to the ordeal of being interviewed was so fiendish that it is possible I may have moved uneasily as I lay.

"Lie still! Curse you!" growled Norman, kicking me savagely. "Now, have you two done your foolery? If so you'd better help me to hoist this fellow up and shoot him throught the window. If he breaks his neck so much the better."

At that moment the engine whistled for a stoppage

"It's too late to do anything of that sort," said Bill. "We're running into Purfleet, and should be seen, and then every one in the carriage would be detained. Besides, he'd be killed to a certainty, and I'm not going to be a party to murder. It would have been kinder to shoot him right out. Let's stick him under the seat. We needn't get out ourselves till the train's starting, and so prevent any one else coming in. Then he couldn't possibly be discovered till the train reaches Grays, which would give us all the start we want. Very likely no one will get in there, and it's just possible he might lie where he is all night, which will be a lesson to him not to interfere again in other people's business."

Stowed away under the seat I accordingly

was, and when the train puffed out of Purfleet Station the three conspirators were gone, and I, like the heavy father in the ballad of Lord Ullin's Daughter, "was left lamenting."

That the reader will pity me I dare hardly hope. We seldom truly pity him at whom we smile, no matter how pitiful his plight; and a man who finds himself tucked away under the seat of a railway carriage, like a forgotten parcel, looking like nothing so much as a trussed fowl, may plead in vain for pity from an unsympathetic world. Pity, like charity, does not always expend herself upon the most deserving objects. Let a young man break a collar bone in a football match, and inquiries after the state of his health will be made with almost tearful tenderness. But let the same young man get ill with the mumps or the measles—maladies infinitely more distressing and painful than a fractured collar bone, for them who take either after childhood—and there will be never an inquiry after his health that is unaccompanied by a grin.

A splitting headache is an endurable ill compared with a bad attack of sea-sickness, and if ever there is a time when mortal flesh and blood stand most in need of human tending, it is at that moment of giving up so much of what is ours, that giving up the

ghost itself would not trouble us greatly. Yet, where twenty will run to carry eau-de-Cologne to mortal flesh with a headache, there is not one who will so oblige the sufferer from *mal-de-mer*.

Hence, as I say, I have small hope of being honoured by the reader's sympathy. Nor, I am bound to admit, do I greatly deserve it. Had I played my cards with judgment when—unseen by Norman—I noticed him sitting alone in a reserved compartment, the odds are that the game had been mine that evening. But humiliating as it is to make such an admission, I cannot protest myself altogether innocent of the crime of losing my head on that particular occasion. "Crime" may seem a hard word to use in such a connexion, but to lose his head is—in the case of a man who has the hardihood and the presumption to constitute himself a detective—scarcely less criminal than for a minister of religion to be detected in gross immorality, or for one of His Majesty's judges to be detected in fraud.

The man called Bill was quite right in presuming that my presence under the carriage seat was not in danger of immediate discovery. No one got in, either at Grays or Tilbury, and it was not until the train had started on its return journey that a

relief party entered the compartment. From the sibilant sounds that reached my under-world, I judged the new-comers to be sweethearts, and as I was not desirous of playing eavesdropper upon their courting, and had, moreover, reasons of my own for not wishing any longer to remain where I was, I made known my presence by a sepulchral groan.

"What hever's that, George?" I heard the damsel exclaim.

"Dog got left behind and gone to sleep, I expect," answered George, bending down to prod violently under the seat with his stick. The ferrule rasped along my knuckles, leaving a nasty "raw," and then took me on the cheek, laying it open from chin to ear. Those of my friends who have had opportunity of judging, have come to the conclusion that I am not incompetent to express an adverse opinion in regard to the eyes, soul, and limbs of anyone of whom I have cause to think unfavourably; and that in such circumstances I may be left to make myself understood without outside assistance. When a man's knuckles look like a peeled plum, and the side of his face like the slit cloth of a billiard table after some clumsy player has made a careless lunge with a cue, that man's opinion of the person responsible

for his hurts is not likely to suffer from understatement; and as a lady was present on this particular occasion, it is just as well, perhaps, that I was unable to give adequate expression to my views.

"My crikey!" said George, bending down, the better to look under the seat, "it's a man."

If he had said "a mouse" the lady could not have been more terrified.

"A man!" she squealed, gathering her skirts together, and scrambling up to stand upon the seat. "Oh! we shall be all murdered, I know we shall! Stop the train, please! Help! help!"

"Oh, shut up!" said George ungallantly, "I expect it's only some one who's trying to do the company by travelling without a ticket. And *we* ain't got a First! Why, I'm blest if he ain't tied up! And there's blood on his face! Some one's been a-trying to murder him instead of his murdering them. We'd best let him alone till we get into the station. I've seen in the papers that when any one's been murdered, the body should be left just as it's found, and no one shouldn't touch it till the police or the doctor come, though what good a doctor's going to do a dead man, I can't see."

Up to this point my groans had been

caused by nothing more serious than a desire for speedy release. The cuts which the stick had inflicted upon my face and knuckles were not serious, and the scuffle with the conspirators had left me comparatively unhurt. Now, however, I groaned in good earnest, for to be discovered by one of the company's officials, and so to have what had happened to me made public, was what I was most anxious to avoid. Certain journalists who write for comic papers would have us to believe that a policeman is never on the spot when he is wanted. That is the journalist's little joke. The real facts of the case are that a policeman can generally be found when he is wanted, and a journalist when he is not. I am not blaming the journalist. His duty is to get news, and if business men generally were as zealous in the discharge of their duties as the majority of journalists are in discharge of theirs, we should hear less of the decline of our national prosperity. But with all respect for the zeal and enterprise of modern journalism, a journalist was the one person whom I did not then wish to see; and I was well aware that —within two minutes of the time of my discovery under the seat—a journalist, armed with pencil, notebook and possibly a photographic camera, would be on the spot.

A cold perspiration broke out over me as I thought of the possibilities for "writing up" which the evening's adventures would afford to a clever paragraphist. I saw in my mind's eye an article headed "Turning the Tables on a Detective. How Mr. Rissler got tied up and tucked away under the Seat of a Railway Carriage." And more horrible still, I saw an accompanying illustration—meant apparently to show what a recently-hanged convict looks like, after he has been cut down—inscribed "Mr. Rissler, as first seen by our artist."

We tell ourselves that we have learned to temper justice with mercy and that the punishment we visit upon offenders is more humane and less brutalizing than it was a hundred years ago. At that moment it seemed to me that there was not much to choose between bygone cruelties and our boasted civilisation. The village stocks, in which we once placed an offender, are superseded to-day by the more public pillory of the Press; but as I thought of that awful paragraph and the accompanying illustration, whereby I should be made the laughing stock of every lout in England—the Press seemed, by comparison with the stocks, the very refinement of exquisite cruelty. It seemed to me like torture reduced to a fine art, and so dreadful was the

possibility I had to contemplate, that I strained like a madman against my bonds. As I did so something—possibly a nail that had come through to the under side of the seat—caught in the handkerchief that bound my wrists. I wrenched violently against it, heard the sound of tearing linen, and felt that my fastenings had become slightly loosened, for whereas, before this, I had lain well nigh as helpless as a log, it was now possible to make some play with my wrists. Again I dragged at the nail, tearing the handkerchief still more, and this time to such purpose that I was able to work and wriggle my hands, and at last succeeded in getting one fist so far free as to be able to pick at the knot. That once untied, as it was in a few minutes, the rest was easy. I slipped my disengaged finger into my waistcoat pocket in search of a penknife which I carried there, and, finding it, managed to cut through the bonds upon my body and arms. Then I removed the handkerchief that was tied across my mouth, and—best of all—disgorged the vile clout that had been thrust halfway down my gullet. The thing had dried my tongue and throat as effectually as a blotting-pad soaks up the ink on a written sheet, and I felt for all the world as if my last meal had been a pint of sawdust. My

mouth was indeed so dry that when my tongue wagged against my cheeks it creaked like a bell-clapper with a rusty hinge. Shall I be believed, I wonder, when I say that it was a sheer joy again to set one's tongue against one's teeth with no fear of its sticking, and that the sensation of returning moisture in the mouth was an exquisite pleasure ?

It is well for us mortals that the Maker of us all is content to give out of His own goodness—not in proportion to our gratitude. Else were we in sorry straits. But God was ever a poor investor, and exacts but an indifferent return for His outlay.

Even as a harp is made to discourse sweet music, so out of this body of ours, God has fashioned an instrument the strings of which vibrate unceasingly with sensations of delight. Yet, so thankless are we for all His gifts, that it is not until a string be snapped or the instrument be broken, that we are aware how sweet had been the now-suspended music. Till then too often it had fallen on unheeding ears.

The operations by which I had rid myself of my bonds had been conducted under the seat where I had been out of sight, if not out of mind of my travelling companions, who were presumably of opinion that I was still a prisoner. With the exception of my legs,

which I could not reach by reason of the cramped space in which I lay, I was a free man, and all that now remained for me to do was to crawl out from under the seat to set my legs at liberty. I was just about to make the necessary move, when the train gave a sudden lurch which shot me out upon the centre of the floor, as neatly as a cigarette is delivered by an automatic machine when some one has put a penny in the slot. My feet were toward the courting couple, who sat huddled together at the one end, and for a moment I lay on my back, looking up at the lamp. Then pulling myself together I jerked myself into a sitting position, facing my fellow-passengers and, extending an authoritative hand, I snapt out in the sharpest, severest, most official-like voice I could assume—

"All tickets, please!"

CHAPTER VIII

A SCARE AND A SKEDADDLE

HAD a being, clad in the angelic garb of another and better world, suddenly appeared to demand their passport to heaven, the two passengers could not have looked more astounded.

"Tickets, please!" I repeated even more sharply, but neither made a move.

"Come! come!" I said, "I must see your tickets. You said just now, sir, that I was wounded, and so I am, but it was by you. It was your stick which cut my cheek; it was your stick which has injured my knuckles. There's plenty of room in the train, and you know it, yet I find the pair of you, on your own admission, travelling in a first-class carriage with a third-class ticket. And, not content with defrauding the company, you must needs commit an unprovoked assault upon an officer who is secreted under the seat to keep a watch upon such passengers as you. This

is a case for the courts. The station at which we are now stopping is Barking. I shall have to trouble the pair of you to accompany me to the station of the Barking police.

The luck, which had been dead against me that evening, had changed, for the next moment I was left alone—as I had wished to be—in the carriage. Even while I had been speaking, "George" had slily slipped open the door, and, nudging his companion to follow him, had jumped out upon the platform, to make a bolt of it the instant the train had stopped.

Excepting for the not very heroic achievement of frightening a couple of louts in order that I might have the carriage to myself, every move I had made since the discovery of Norman in the reserved smoker had miscarried.

Next, however, to never making a false move, is promptness in rectifying the false move that has been made, and back to Purfleet I went by the very first train to see if once again I could get upon the track of the three abductors. Five minutes of the quarter of an hour's "wait" at Barking were occupied in the lavatory, removing the traces of my late encounter. Then I went in search of an outfitter's shop, and being so fortunate

as to find one not far from the station, I purchased a new hat (my own had been trodden upon in the scuffle) and a light overcoat to cover the multitude of rents in my garment. Being now more presentable, and finding I had still a few minutes to spare, I refreshed myself with a cup of coffee and a sandwich at a bun shop, so that when the train trundled out of Barking station on its way to Purfleet, I was feeling quite myself. Once again, however, the luck was against me. I interviewed the porters, the ticket inspectors, and the station master at Purfleet station, but all to no purpose. The train about which I was inquiring had been unusually full, and as the three conspirators had no doubt passed out singly, no one could give me any information that afforded a clue. In Purfleet village I was equally unsuccessful. My belief was that Norman and Co. were by this time well on their way down the river on board some sort of craft, whither it was very likely that Lady Southborne had already been conveyed, but I did not for this reason neglect to make necessary inquiries on land. All was, however, in vain. There was not a craft that was lying, or had lain, off Purfleet, about which I could learn anything suspicious. Nor could I discover a clue of any sort in the village, so for that night at least

I had to abandon the search and busy myself in making sure of a bed at the hotel.

Next morning I was up early to extend my researches to Grays and to Tilbury, but with a like result. I can honestly say that never in my life have I conducted an investigation more thoroughly. I chartered a small steam launch and explored the river reaches from Tilbury to Southend, and from Tilbury to town; I scoured the country for miles around on the Kent as well as on the Essex side of the river, for the possibility of Norman having crossed to Gravesend by ferry was one of the first points to present itself for consideration. All my efforts were, however unavailing, and I had at last to admit that, in regard to the first of my three clues, the game was up.

CHAPTER IX

A CLUE

THE reader will remember the trickery by which I had obtained possession of a document belonging to Norman. That document had unfortunately been burnt, and as my glance at it had been as momentary as one's peep at a lightning-lit landscape seen at midnight, I could hardly be expected to know much of the contents. But there is no such instantaneous photography as is taken by the camera of the eye. If only one could "fix the negative"—could see again at will the wonderland of Alpine mountain, the fairyland of cloud and sky—if only one could look out upon an English meadow at high noon in July, and watch the air flicker in the earth-radiated heat, as if a myriad of dancing, darting but invisible gnats were holding mazy revels over the clover heads—if only one could recall those faces in the street, those flowers in the hedgerows—could see again the superb strength in the poise of that swimmer, standing erect in naked

beauty, a statue in the sun, before his arrowy leap and dive—the curve of that glorious bosom soft and sweet-scented as a handful of sun-warmed rose-petals—the angel-look in the eyes of a child,—if, as I say, we could at will recall these and a thousand other pictures, how lightly should we then esteem the now valued reminders of art!

But even though we cannot fix the negatives that are taken by the camera of the eye, it is marvellous with what despatch the brain and the eye work together, and I could clearly recall—visualize is, I suppose, the word—certain features of the lost document as those features had presented themselves to the camera of my eye. There, apparently copied out by him from the original letter, was the message from his employer which Norman had read to me that morning. Next came some initials with addresses filled in beneath—my own address, under my initials "M. R.", heading the list. This was followed by some feminine names and addresses, written in full, and I remember that in the moment of letting my eye light upon the list I had said to myself—

"Is it possible that I have here the roll-call of the villain's intended victims?" I had no opportunity to read these names, and had I been asked, five minutes after-

wards, to enumerate them, I could not have mentioned one. But as I lay half-asleep and half-awake with closed eyelids on the following morning, a picture—a negative if you like so to call it—of the lost document floated up somewhere out of darkness and edged diagonally across the black disc of my inward vision. As it did so the first and the last of the feminine names on the abductor's list "developed," as if by contact with some chemical of the mind, and I read them clearly The first was—

ISABEL, MARCHIONESS OF SOUTHBORNE,
Southborne Castle,
Leicestershire.

and the last—

MISS JOYCE FAIRFAX,
Care of Lady Hampton,
Hampton House, St. Albans.

The explanation of what happened I must leave to those who are better acquainted than I am with the science of optics, and with the conditions under which impressions are taken and retained by the retina.

What I was concerned to know was how the name of "Joyce Fairfax" came to be in the place where I had seen it, or thought I had seen it. Had it been a familiar name to me I should have been prepared to believe

that memory had played me a trick. Like the man who manages the lantern, and slips in the slides for a lecturer, Memory is sometimes apt to lose her head, and in her over-anxiety to serve us, projects upon the canvas, not the picture that should be there, but one which lies near at hand and is in some way associated with it in her mind.

But the name of Joyce Fairfax was strange to me, and I was more than minded to believe that the real explanation of the matter was that this very name had been inscribed upon Norman's document, and had, unknown to me, been photographed for after-reproduction upon the retina of my eye. Anyhow, I was resolved to put the question to the test. Should there really prove to be a lady of the name of Joyce Fairfax living at the address I thought I had seen on the paper, I should be justified in assuming—since her name appeared in conjunction with that of the Marchioness of Southborne—that she was one of the ladies whom Norman intended to abduct. Were that so, clue number two should prove a winning card in the game I was playing ; and to St. Albans I went hot-foot in search of information.

It happened that I had a married sister living there to whom I had long promised

to pay a visit, so that I was in a position to make the necessary inquiries without appearing to be too inquisitive.

"By the bye, old girl," I said to my sister as we were sitting at breakfast, "do you happen to know a lady living in this neighbourhood by the name of Fairfax—Joyce Fairfax."

My sister was in the act of pouring out some coffee as I spoke.

"What!" was all she said; but the bang with which she suddenly put down the coffee-pot, heedless of the fact that she had only half filled my cup, and the surprise with which she sat staring at me, could not be conveyed in cold print, even with the aid of half a dozen notes of exclamation.

I repeated my question.

"Yes," she said, with a comical look of perplexity, "I was thinking of her at that very moment; but what do *you* know about her?"

"Absolutely nothing, my dear, except her name," I said indifferently.

"And who mentioned her name to you?" she persisted.

'No one, no one. I saw it accidentally in a letter."

"What letter?" she demanded, "and who wrote it?"

"My dear girl!" I protested, "why this cross-examination? The letter in which I saw Miss Fairfax's name was one which I was not intended to see, and I can't tell you who wrote it, for I don't even know the man's name."

"Oh, it was a he, was it?" she said sagely. "It seems to me that there's a good deal of mystery about your knowledge of Miss Fairfax. I've never kept anything from you, Max, and you might just as well tell me all about it. I wouldn't ask if I hadn't a reason."

"There *is* a mystery, my dear," I said, "but you're making it; and now let me ask a few questions. What do *you* know about Miss Fairfax?"

"Only that she's the very loveliest girl I've ever seen, and seems just as nice as she looks. The woman friends with whom she is most intimate all adore her, and the woman, whom women genuinely like, is nearly always the right sort. It isn't always so with the woman that men are most taken with. Some of Miss Fairfax's woman friends treat her as if she were a little queen, and defer to her, and look up to her in the prettiest way possible, though the people who don't like her, don't like her at all. But there are very few who don't like her, for she's wonderfully

kind-hearted, and to the poor she's a very Lady Bountiful. I never heard of any one going to her for help and coming away empty-handed. She's very interested in you, let me tell you, sir, and I think you ought to be highly flattered. She asked me all sorts of questions about you when I met her for the first time the other day."

"Where did you meet her?" I inquired. "Does she live here?"

"Oh, no! She's an American, and is staying for the season with Lady Hampton, who, as every one knows, is a long way from being rich, for all her historic descent. There's no harm in telling you, for Helen Hampton doesn't make any secret of it to her intimate friends, that Miss Fairfax—who's one of *the* Fairfaxes, though she belongs to an American branch of the family—has come to a friendly arrangement, by which she makes some sort of return to Helen for taking her under her social wing, so to speak, and for her hospitality. You see, like many American women, Miss Fairfax is rather unconventional and delightfully independent, and thinks nothing of running off to Switzerland or Norway or Algiers either by herself, or else with some other woman friend. But when she's in England—especially when she's in town, where she always stays with the

Hamptons at Cadogan Gardens—she has to conform a little more to the usages of society, and it's very nice for her to have a woman of some standing to chaperon her and take her under her social wing. I believe that the arrangement is a great success, and is a help to the Hamptons, too. Anyhow, it seems to work very well, for Helen and she are devoted to each other. I'm sure you'd like Miss Fairfax. I think she's just the loveliest woman I've ever seen. And, as I said, she is most interested in your work and in you, and she's very rich, and so——"

"And so, you scheming little humbug," I interrupted, "you've set your heart on match-making again have you? Let me see, is this the seventh or the eighth, Mrs. Max Rissler, of your planning? But you may spare your pains, my dear; I'm a confirmed old bachelor, and too much of a Bohemian to think of settling down to anything so respectable as married life, even if any of the nice girls whose future you had arranged so pleasantly would look at me—which none of them ever would, and small blame to them, say I. But I'm rather interested in what I've heard of Miss Fairfax, and shall be very glad to make her acquaintance if opportunity offers."

"Opportunity offers this very night," said

my sister. "Lady Hampton and Miss Fairfax and I are all going together to a big concert in the Assembly Rooms. I'm to pick them up on the way after dinner, and if you're very good, and make yourself look very nice, you shall come too. They'll be glad to see you, for I'd already promised to bring you to call at Hampton House"

CHAPTER X

LADY LOOKING-GLASS

THE maid took my sister up to Lady Hampton's sanctum when we arrived, I being shown into the drawing-room to wait. Two long rooms had apparently been thrown into one by the removal of folding doors, but only one of the two rooms was lighted. I walked to the unlighted end, where there was an octagonal recess, with a window seat, whence one had a view of the ancient abbey. As I stood there, looking up at the grand grey pile, I heard a sound, and, turning round, I saw at the other end of the room the most beautiful woman upon whom I have ever set eyes.

The peculiarly exquisite whiteness of skin and blush-rose freshness of colouring which are seldom or never seen except in conjunction with a wealth of red-gold hair, go, generally, with a *petite* type of beauty. But here at last was a woman whose rich coils of shining auburn, rare purity of skin, and loveli-

ness of colouring, combined the exquisite delicacy of the wild rose with the ampler splendour of the crimson-hearted regal rose of June. Her height was probably above the average, but her slight and graceful figure was perfect in its moulding. Her eyes were like no other eyes that I have ever seen. More often than not, the type of beauty which I have described is marred—for me, at least—by eyes of an almost uncanny brown-red. Hers, except for the fact that they glowed every now and then like the heart of a live coal, had nothing in common with the type. I hesitate to give a name to their colouring. It seems to me that we are sometimes too ready to label eyes as "red," "blue," "brown," "steel-grey" or "black," very much as a woman matches a piece of ribbon by means of a colour-card in a draper's shop. Joyce Fairfax's eyes changed their colour as frequently as the sky and sea change theirs, but the prevailing tint can only be described as purple—not the transparent purple of the amethyst, but the brooding purple of a distant, heather-covered, mist-crowned, Highland hill; and by night they darkened to the black purple that we see in the heart of a pansy.

I have described the woman to you as I afterwards came to know her, but at the

moment of which I am writing I was too disconcerted to think of anything but how to get away unseen. She was in evening dress, and evidently unaware of my presence, for she was standing on a chair to admire herself in the mantel glass. One white arm was thrown behind her head in an attitude which I can only suppose had been copied from the photograph of a popular actress. The other hand was pressed beneath her breasts, which she gathered together, like heaped snowdrifts, into a vision of high-bosomed loveliness, wherein she snuggled her dainty chin as between two nestling white doves, making pretty little *moues* at herself in the glass meanwhile. It seems almost indelicate to describe all this in cold blood, but it must be done, if the reader is rightly to follow the course of my story.

To stand there, playing Peeping Tom, a moment more than was absolutely unavoidable was abhorrent to a man with even rudimentary instincts in regard to what constitutes, or does not constitute, a gentleman, yet had I discovered myself suddenly, the start might have caused her to fall from the chair, and to do herself an injury. I had, moreover, to consider her own feelings. Could I, by any chance, get away unseen, she might never have the humiliation and the mortification

of knowing that there had been a witness—above all a masculine witness—of her pretty peacock-like preenings. My one prayer was that the lovely *vaniteuse* would make an end of her attitudinizing, and leave the room before my presence was discovered. Stand there, shamelessly staring, I could not, so I turned my back upon the room, to resume my study of the ancient abbey. In so doing—clumsy fool that I was—I lurched against a tiny occasional table, displacing a book, which fell with a bang to the floor. I heard Miss Fairfax jump lightly from the chair and trip across the room to the recess. When I turned she was holding back the curtain and looking at me She gave a frightened little scream as, lying shamelessly in the hope of saving the situation, I came forward apologetically.

"I hope I didn't startle you," I said; "I thought I was alone in the room, for I did not hear any one come in, and I was admiring your lovely view of the abbey. It looks nobler than ever by moonlight. May I introduce myself? My name is Rissler, and you, I take it, are the Miss Fairfax of whom my sister, Mrs Cottingdean, has told me."

I spoke, I believe, quite naturally, and with no sign of embarrassment, but Miss Fairfax was not to be deceived. For one

moment she looked me in the eyes, and though her back was to the light, I saw the rush of shamed blood that crimsoned her face and neck, and the red danger light that glowed, like a live coal, in her wonderful eyes. Then, all in a second, she turned deathly white.

"You are lying," she said, with a lash in her voice that cut me like a whip, "and you know it."

Without another word she dropped the curtain and swept contemptuously from the room.

* * * * *

As for Mr. Max Rissler, his feeling concerning himself was that, if buyers were about, there was an opportunity to pick up an experienced novelist-detective at a price that might never occur again. His face was the colour hers had been, for the blood was beating in his brain a tattoo that was like the tapping of finger tips upon a drum.

As a faithful historian it is my painful duty to record that the first remark he made was of a profane nature, after which he still further eased himself by swearing softly but savagely under his breath, cursing the folly of men, the vanity of women, the world in general, and himself in particular.

After that he felt better, for in moments

of extreme mental tension the one sex seems to find as much relief in profanity as the other sex finds in tears. Then his thoughts flew from Miss Fairfax to Inspector Norman. It was a new experience to find himself in sympathy with that worthy, but as he recalled the man's remark about women—that they were "kittle-cattle"—he felt that for once in his life the inspector's sentiments were his own.

Mr. Rissler's sister had laid her plans cleverly, but her project was not working out precisely according to programme, for when, five minutes later, the three ladies swept into the drawing-room, and he was formally presented to Miss Fairfax, he received a bow so icy that the cut direct could scarcely have been more contemptuous.

And all the while he would have thought the fingers of his right hand well lost for the sake of a single smile!

CHAPTER XI

MY FIRST LOVE AFFAIR: AN INTERLUDE WHICH MAY BE SKIPPED BY THE IMPATIENT READER

WHEN the friends of my youth and myself were all boys and girls together, a sister of mine, who would have made a fortune as a company promoter, formed a Classical and Mythological Syndicate upon new and original lines. The names of the various gods and goddesses were apportioned to the members of our own and one or two other families with whom we were intimate. The chief promoter dubbed herself Diana, possibly because she was afraid of cows. The rôle of Venus was appropriately conceded to a girl friend of hers with weak eyes and a tendency to premature baldness. The eldest sister of our family, being popularly supposed to be a beauty, was christened Helen of Troy, and her *fiancé* Paris. My recollection of Paris (who wore glasses) is that he was a better judge of butterflies, of which he was an enthusiastic collector, than

of beauty; but as he sometimes allowed me the loan of his green baize bag-net, I considered him a decided improvement upon his namesake.

On account of my extreme youth I was not at first taken into the confidence of the Syndicate, and so did not join the Board until what I may call the preferential shares had been allotted. The rôles of Jupiter, Juno, Saturn, Venus, Diana, Mercury, Apollo, and Mars were already apportioned; and my proposal to take over and carry on the old-established business of either Pluto or Vulcan was scouted on the score of my juvenility. Not wishing to be left out in the cold, I suggested that in the character of Cupid no reasonable objection could be raised in regard to youth; and but for the attitude of Venus, who declined to acknowledge as her son a boy who, she libellously alleged, "never washed his neck," I might have been appointed to the vacant post. But Venus was obdurate, and put the facts against me so clearly, not to say coarsely, that most of the gods and goddesses present inclined—I could see—to my utter exclusion from the Olympian Fields. In my little world this would have been tantamount to social annihilation, so I begged that—failing any other—I might at least be allowed to fill the humble

rôle of Cerberus. I reminded them that the Psalmist had said he would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord than dwell in the tents of wickedness, and that personally I would rather be the gatekeeper of Hades than dwell in the outer dark beyond Olympus.

The assembled gods and goddesses were clearly staggered by my intimate acquaintance with Scripture; and the rôle of Cerberus, being one for which there was no competition, I was—despite the protests of Venus—awarded the vacant post. Two days afterwards the gods and goddesses gave a party; and there I met my fate, whose name—in Olympian circles—was Vesta. I had been in her company many times before, but for some unexplained reason (so swift and wonderful is the coming of love) the fact that she was dowered with beauty had never occurred to me. I do not remember that until that particular evening I had ever given two thoughts to her existence. But that party sealed my fate. 'Tis true I bade her goodnight coldly, and stalked frowning darkly from the room—for my haughty spirit chafed at the indignity of being "fetched," and by a red-cheeked nursery-maid. But the blood sang in my brain all the way home; and that night, and many a night after, I lay awake, brooding over the too-brief happiness

of the party, and recalling this saying of hers and that answer of mine, and thinking regretfully of all the pretty things I might have said—and didn't. Even thus early in my life I had to learn that the rehearsals in which we do most justice to ourselves are those that take place, not before, but after the performance.

Even thus early, too, my untamed spirit mutinied against the petty restrictions of the Real. From dwelling upon what had been, I passed on to dream of what might be, and created for her and myself a new and romantic world in which to wander. Again and again I rescued her from a watery grave. Alone, and when the bravest spirits quailed and held back, I entered the burning building, at the topmost window of which (the little fool always fled to the topmost window, even when there was time to escape unharmed by the door) she stood, a white-robed, pitiful figure, stretching imploring arms, and wailing "Save me! oh, save me!" to the terror-stricken crowd below.

From stealthy-stepping burglars, masked, and with murder gleaming in their eyes, I rescued her—from mad dogs, goring bulls, and hordes of tomahawking Indians. Sometimes I did so at the cost of my own life, sometimes I passed unharmed through the

ordeal, to be hailed a hero by enthusiastic thousands; and I remember that when overdone to the point of satiety by the applause of my fellow-countrymen and countrywomen, I varied the programme by bringing my brave deeds to the knowledge of the Queen. On such occasions Her Majesty would send for the youthful hero, that she might express before the Court, the Commander-in-Chief, and the young and pretty female members of the Royal Family, the sense of confidence with which the knowledge that she counted so brave a soul among her subjects inspired her.

More often, however, gloomier thoughts prevailed. I would plunge myself into exquisite melancholy by imagining that an overwhelming weight of circumstantial evidence had made me to appear guilty of an awful crime (murder for choice).

But the knowledge of my innocence, and the consciousness of Vesta's absolute faith and unwavering love, so sustained me throughout the terrible ordeal, that the dignity and manliness of my bearing had won the admiration even of those who had most believed in my guilt. After sentence had been passed, I had stepped from the dock as proudly as if I had been a conqueror leaving the lists instead of a condemned man going to his

doom. And then had come the crash, when all my world had tumbled about my ears; for in that awful moment I had learned that she in whom I trusted had forsaken me, and was now of the company of my accusers.

With a terrible calm I had met my fate, sending her the assurance of my love with my last breath. And too late she and the world had learnt that I was innocent; and for her, life had nothing more to offer than a vista of years of unavailing remorse, spent for the most part in long watches by my tomb.

Perhaps even thus early in my career the soul of the future new-century novelist was awakening, for even then I had a stern contempt for the conventional "wedding-bells and happy-ever-afterwards" ending to a love story. Or was it a premonition? The reader shall judge.

By going slightly out of the direct course it was possible on my way to school to pass the house where Vesta—or rather Vesta's father—resided. It was the kind of house one sees so frequently in dingy suburbs of London—a stuccoed, jerry-built abomination that ran as obtrusively to bay window as the City Alderman of certain comic papers (I have not yet met the type outside their pages) runs to paunch.

Along the sill of this bay window was a tiny railing, the purpose of which was presumably to keep flower-pots, which might be placed there, from falling off. This railing, Vesta's father (who I am persuaded was a vulgar creature) had lavishly gilded. By reminding one of a large-patterned watch-chain, stretched across an expansive waistcoat, it still further emphasized the bay window's resemblance to a prominent portion of the anatomy of the City Alderman aforesaid.

I saw the house again only the other day, and wondered whether outside England there existed another building so pretentious and so ugly. But to me in those days it was the Palace where dwelt the Fairy Princess—to me it was "all a wonder and a sheer delight." The days, as they came and went, held for me only two supreme moments—the moments in which I passed and repassed those happy walls on my way to and from school. If I had dared I would have passed and repassed a dozen times; but on the one occasion when I intentionally dropped one of my class-books, that I might have a pretext for returning to look for it, Vesta's father (red-faced wretch!—even in those days I inclined to the belief that he was given to drink) saw me, and throwing up the window bawled

rudely: "Now then, young Rissler! Skulking again! It's past nine now! You'd better hurry up, or you'll get the dust knocked out of your knickerbockers with a birch rod."

The odious upstart! To speak in that vulgar way, and in the presence of his daughter, who, I was sure, must be feeling his offensiveness keenly. I was so sorry for her that I was at first minded to stop and explain —of course with chilling hauteur—that I was merely returning in search of a book which I had dropped, and to give him to understand that the head-master was a gentleman (with emphasis), and he, at least, would not so far forget himself as to use offensive expressions in the presence of a lady. I was glad afterwards that I had contented myself by regarding him with a look of withering contempt, and had not lowered myself to his level by condescending to explain. Such creatures are incapable of understanding the feelings of finer natures, as was proved by the fact that, as I walked hastily away—lest I should be tempted to say things to *her* father which I should afterwards regret—I heard him slap his huge hand upon his knee at delight of his brandy-born wit, and exclaim: "See how I've made the young beggar scuttle! What I said

tickled him up almost as badly as if it had been old Thing-me-bob's cane!"

After this disgusting exhibition I felt that it would not be dignified on my part to risk a repetition of such a scene by passing and repassing the house, and that I must find other means of bringing myself to Vesta's recollection.

Since the night of the party I had scarcely entered the school playground, and had sadly neglected not only my studies but the field sports to which I was devoted. But that morning, as I was moping in the playground, an idea occurred to me. In the corner, where stood the gymnasium, was a climbing-pole, from the summit of which one could see not only the Palace of Delight, but the hospitable bay window in which it was the Fairy Princess's custom to sit. Two steps, resembling a cross-bar, jutted out on each side of the pole, a foot or two from the top, where they had thoughtfully been set that the winded and weary climber might regain his breath and view the landscape o'er ere plunging slide-wise down the shining shaft. By throwing a leg over either step and sitting close-hugged to the pole it was possible to remain perched on that "bad eminence" for a considerable time; and thither I betook myself on every opportunity. I was the

first in the playground in the morning, I was the last to leave it in the afternoon; and but for the fact that Vesta's father (who I was persuaded was a humbug and a hypocrite) religiously attended church, where by ricking my neck to look round a column I could get an occasional peep at her back hair—my Sundays would have been unendurable. Among my schoolfellows strange rumours were afloat to account for my eccentric behaviour—one of which was that I had murdered somebody, and was in hourly expectation of the arrival of the constable, the appearance of whom would be the signal for my flight. An embryo Sherlock Holmes gave it as his opinion that I had taken to pigeon-stealing, and had arranged a code of signals with an accomplice somewhere in the old town, so that whenever a valuable bird flew overhead in that direction my partner in crime might lure it into his traps by means of a peculiar whistle which, it was popularly supposed, no pigeon born of egg could resist. To this theory such colour was lent by the robbery one night of a neighbouring hen-roost, that the owner sent for me and threatened to give me in charge unless I made a full confession. It was not until I had explained that I had decided to take the first opportunity of running away to sea, and that my pole-

climbing and pole-perching proclivities were the result of my anxiety to prepare myself for the duties I should have to perform on "lookout" in the "crow's nest," that his suspicions were allayed.

I heard recently of a humorous fellow (I should like to shake him by the hand if only for the sake of the human heart of him) who wrote for his own epitaph the legend "He tried hard not to be a liar." Remembering the escapade of my schooldays, I realize (and I hope the reader will realize) how easy it is for an imaginative boy to tell a lie.

But, the taunts and suspicions of my schoolmates notwithstanding, my steps, like the mariner's compass, turned ever to the pole, up which I would "shin" to sit and make calves' eyes at the form in the far-away window. Once, when no one was looking, I ventured to wave a handkerchief, and to my inexpressible delight the signal was returned.

> "Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
> When a new planet swims into his ken;
> Or like stout Cortez, when with eagle eyes
> He stared at the Pacific—and all his men
> Looked at each other with a wild surmise,
> Silent upon a peak in Darien."

Could it be—was it possible—that my vigil was thus to be rewarded? Again I waved the handkerchief; and again came the

answering signal. The days of chivalry are past; but never did fair lady of long ago wave a lily-white hand at a casement to a knight whose heart beat more merrily beneath his coat of mail than did mine beneath my blue serge Norfolk jacket. My passion was returned! She had marked Love's lonely sentry standing faithful at his post; and Love, the great Teacher, had taught her to read Love's countersign aright.

Henceforth I was more faithful than ever at my vigil, for again and again the signal was returned. What cared I now for the frowns of her haughty father, the baron! (I always pictured him to myself as a plundering baron of feudal days—but I believe his particular form of plunder was not unconnected with an agency for Life Assurance.) He might order his minions to close the portcullis in my face; he might imprison his fair daughter in the topmost turret of his frowning keep; but Love laughs at locksmiths, and while he and his boon companions were carousing—not, I expect, in the hat-hung, umbrella-guarded hall, but in the more spacious if less mediæval dining-room—she and I were exchanging signals of deathless love across the sundering gulf (two back streets, a laundry-woman's "drying-ground," and the site for a proposed Baptist chapel).

At last my faithfulness was rewarded. Since the night of the party my love had necessarily been a far-off worship—"the desire of the moth for the star, of the night for the morrow"—but there came a beatific morning when for one at least of Adam's race the primal curse was withdrawn, and flesh and blood walked again in Paradise. I was sent to her house one day with a letter for her sister. It was something to do with a concert, but as her sister was engaged at the moment, I was asked to come in and wait. As I entered the room—the room of the bay window—my heart fluttered up like a bird in my throat, for there, looking in the direction of the school, sat Vesta. Her face was turned away from me, but something there was in her attitude that seemed to speak of tender melancholy. Was it possible, could it be, that she was thinking of me, and was torturing herself by wondering whether my love had grown cold, that I should thus fail her at the accustomed time? For this was our trysting-hour, the hour when she and I held commune together across the aforesaid gulf. Perhaps in her dear eyes that lonely figure was invested with a gentle dignity, a tender pathos. My steadfastness at my post—even remembering that the circumstances were not conducive to inconstancy, and that any

attempt at "flightiness" on my part might have had a painful termination—must surely awaken an answering chord in her breast; for what true woman could long remain untouched by such fidelity as mine?

It had been a happy time for her—all the way to the house. I had said and looked such things as must set her little heart fluttering with gladness—things which, when the dear spell was broken, and the very world felt empty because I was gone, she would repeat tenderly to herself as she sat looking out into the dreaming sunset. Never did lover bear himself more bravely in his true love's presence than I had borne myself in hers—in my imagination.

But as I stood there, fumbling with my cap, and wondering whether my hair was smooth, and wishing I had thought to take a peep at the mirror in the hat-stand as I passed, the things I had meant to say struck me suddenly as singularly unsuited for the occasion. If only by stopping a runaway horse I could have saved the life of a beautiful Royal Princess within full view of the bay window, and then have staggered to Vesta's feet to die, I felt that I could, under such circumstances, have opened the conversation with an ease which at present I was far from feeling. To die in her presence would, com-

paratively speaking, be a happiness compared to standing in that august presence with ruffled hair (why, oh, why! had I not thought to look in the glass?), and I was every moment becoming more and more painfully conscious that my hair was not only not smooth, but disgracefully untidy.

And then, turning, she saw me, and spoke to me so sweetly that my confidence was somewhat restored; and I found myself explaining all about the letter, and not only thinking that I wasn't so sure about wishing to die, but actually wondering whether it would not be possible to revert to my first programme and say all the things I had planned.

"And where do you go to school?" she asked by-and-by.

I looked at her reproachfully. "Why, over there, of course. And oh, I say, Miss Hilda—Vesta! May I call you Vesta?—I'm Cerberus, you know."

"Well, of all the cheek!" she said: "you *are* a tip-topper! And at your age!"

I winced. The slang—though I do not approve of slang in the other sex—I could pardon; but the allusion to my age—though of course I was aware that she was five years my senior—was indelicate.

"So you go to old Ponderby's school—

college he calls it, doesn't he?" she went on. "What fun! And of course you know all the boys. Then you can tell us who's the little fright who spends all his time on the monkey pole, and sometimes has the cheek to wave to us. It amuses us all awfully, pa especially. We look for him every morning, and sometimes when pa's in a good humour he waves back. Who *is* the little object? Do tell me."

And with dreadful calm, and in a voice that sounded to me like somebody else's, I answered, "Tompkins Major. He's going to sea, and as he's always getting into rows at school, he says he expects he'll get into rows on the training-ship. So he climbs up the monkey post to practise being 'mast-headed.'"

I'm afraid that the man whose wish it was that the legend "He tried hard not to be a liar" should be graved upon his tomb must have been a novelist. Lying comes easy to people of that sort, even when they're young.

* * * * *

I played in the last cricket match of the season that year, after all, and should have captained the football team if I had stayed on at the school,—for I decided that, as far as I was concerned, monkey posts and mytho-

logy were "off." But Vesta's young brother came to the school next term, and told all the fellows that I was "gone on his sister." When I said he was a liar, and challenged him to fight, he wouldn't. So I landed him with his three coward blows, and then he had to. He made my nose bleed, but I gave him a black eye; and Vesta stopped me in the street next day and said I was "a cowardly little bully,"—which was mean, because her brother was older than I was and a good deal bigger. And when I put my tongue out at her, she told her father (that's the worst of girls—they're such sneaks!), and the old boy came round to my father and got me an awful hiding. But I paid her out, for I sent her a valentine with a picture of a pasty-faced girl with red hair, and I wrote "Wax Vestas" underneath it. Then her father came round to mine again, and there was another row. But when old Ponderby was tarring his chicken-house I sneaked the tar-pot and tarred the gold railing around the bay window of her father's house. And then they said at home that they thought I'd better go to a boarding-school.

CHAPTER XII

I INTERVIEW SCOTLAND YARD

MY first love affair, the story of which has been told in the preceding chapter was not a success, and my second seemed like to end even more disastrously.

That my sister, Mrs. Cottingdean, had set her heart upon finding me a wife, and some unfortunate feminine friend of hers a husband, was plain—as the phrase goes—"to the meanest intelligence."

I did not argue with the little woman, my attitude being that of Uncle Remus's Tar Baby, when coming under the persuasive power of Brer Rabbit—"Tar Baby he ain't a-sayin' nothin'." I had my own opinion upon the subject all the same, and this opinion was that if Miss Fairfax were a necessary figure in the pretty little picture of domestic bliss which Mrs. Cottingdean had painted, the affair was like to have an unhappy termination. The hostility towards myself of my Lady of the Looking-Glass was unmistakable. Palmists tell us that character lies hidden in the hand. They point to a

line or a mound as the measure of amorousness, honesty, greed. If the lines that spell vanity were visible upon the hand, I am persuaded that sleeping or waking we should all wear gloves, for vanity is the vulnerable spot in most of us—the spot where the skin is thinnest—which is the first to be wounded and the last to be healed. A wound to our pride, even to our honour, may be forgotten and forgiven by man and by woman, but a wound to our vanity, seldom or never.

It was Miss Fairfax's vanity which I had unintentionally injured, and her animosity towards the offender was implacable. When she found that I was to be the attendant cavalier at the concert, she said that she had changed her mind and did not purpose to go.

Inferring from this that Miss Fairfax was feeling unwell, Lady Hampton expressed her intention of remaining at home with her guest. My Lady of the Looking-Glass would, however, hear of nothing of the sort. Stamping her little foot angrily, she declared that she was never better in her life, that she hated being "fussed," and that Lady Hampton could remain at home if she wished to do so, but that for her part she, Miss Fairfax, had changed her mind and now meant to go.

In another than herself I should have

thought this display of temper—and before a stranger—in questionable taste, but to me, even thus early in our acquaintance, Joyce Fairfax seemed to stand apart from all other women in the world. She was not to be judged by the petty rules that we apply to mediocrities. The thing that she chose to do, or not to do, became right or wrong as by royal prerogative, merely because she had so chosen. Her own conduct was the only criterion of manners or of taste. Even the scene before the mirror was undergoing a process of transmutation in my memory. It was no longer an exhibition of vanity. It was a sacred and intimate revelation of the sweet womanliness of her nature. May not a lovely woman take innocent joy in her own loveliness without being accused of affectation or vanity ?

Of that scene I had been an unintentional and indeed an unwilling spectator. For that I was in no way to blame, but to allow what I had witnessed to influence my judgment, would be almost as dishonourable as to take an unfair advantage of an opponent. For the life of me I could not shake off the feeling that I had been a party to a theft—the theft of the privacy which is the unalienable right of every human being. Eavesdropping and prying are as repugnant in

man or woman as personal uncleanliness. The one is an unclean habit of the mind; the other of the body. Each is equally odious in the eyes of honourable men and women.

Under the circumstances it seemed to me that the sight I had witnessed (and I shall never see prettier) was not mine to recall, and I made myself quite miserable because—do what I would—that exquisite vision of loveliness, making love, Narcissus-like, to itself before the glass, refused to be banished from my thoughts. It was I, not Miss Fairfax, who had cause to be unhappy; it was I, not she, who was called to make defence; and when on our way home from the concert my sister expressed her amazement at the exhibition of temper which we had witnessed, and her mortification at what she was pleased to call Miss Fairfax's inexplicable rudeness to myself, I took the poor little woman to task so sharply for her uncharitableness that she was reduced to a condition closely bordering on tears. The fact is that I was hopelessly in love and could endure no word of disparagement of the object of my devotion.

Before I opened my eyes on the morning after the concert I was aware that some great change had come over my life. I have heard what is called "conversion" described as a "new birth." In comparing the change

which love works in the heart to the change which is wrought in a man's soul by religion I am conscious of no irreverence.

If conversion be the "new birth of the soul" the coming of love is surely the new birth of the heart.

Joyce Fairfax may or may not have been deserving of worship, but when once my heart was given to her—as given it assuredly was—all life was for me lifted to an immeasurably nobler plane. Love may be and perhaps is, the Poetry of Sex, but it is more than that. It is the Awakening of the Angel in man or woman, even though as yet the angel be meshed in the divinely-beautiful, God-made garb of flesh.

Four times only is the Halo seen around the head of mortals. Around the head of the little soul newly come from God, there shines the rainbow-hued Halo of Childhood; around the head of the young mother, fondling her first-born, there shines the white and sacred Halo of Motherhood; around the head of him or her whose soul has newly gone to God, there shines the purple-royal Halo of Death; and around the head of lad or maiden, man or woman, who, in love's supreme and sacred season, is lifted nearest to God, there shines the rose-coloured Halo of Love.

My love for Joyce Fairfax was not so much a passion as a consecration. I had read love poems and love stories in which it was said that love made the world anew for the happy lover. It had been pleasant enough to be young and alive before, but now mere existence—mere being—suddenly culminated into bliss. Winter and autumn had slipped from the calendar, for love had stayed the season mid-way between summer and spring. The days as they passed were set to music of which "June nights and May mornings" was the glad refrain. "June nights and May mornings!" "June nights and May mornings!" was the carillon that chimed again and again in the belfry of the lover's brain. And never before, since the world was set a-rolling through blue space, had there dawned May mornings so blithe, so dewy as these. Had the great world been no great world after all, but a crystal ball that bobbed and danced and poised, that shot up or sank on the snowy crest of a fountain-jet—it could not have been more buoyant, more dewy, more diamonded with spray than on these magic mornings in May. Or had the great world been only a big rainbow-hued bubble afloat in space, the fanning of the evening breeze upon forehead and cheek could not have been gentler than it was in

these magical June nights, set in amber and pearl, when the tenderness of the twilight lapsed in the West, like a lark sinking into his nest; and all the world lay listening to a silence that was richer, fuller, more lyric than song.

In the love poems and love stories which I remembered, love had made the world anew for the happy lovers. In my case the change was not in the world, but in myself. I was no longer the man I had been. Merely to refrain from what was mean or evil had hitherto been the measure of my content. Now I could not tolerate so much as a moment's entertainment of a mean or evil thought. The knighthood that was once to be won at the cost of blood, is now too often to be purchased by money; and bank books bulk bigger than brains when titles are to be bestowed. But though knighthood and the days of chivalry be gone—chivalry and knightliness endure; for wherever a youth goes forth to do battle with evil for the sake of the pure love he bears to a maiden—*there* rides Sir Galahad in white armour.

Even I, who was no longer young; I who could not lay claim to anything in common with a Quixote, still less with a Galahad; even I was urged by love to the execution of a duty which was directly opposed to my own inclination.

Since I had looked into the eyes of Joyce Fairfax my conscience had been uncomfortably active, and I now began to feel uneasy in mind in regard to my having elected to act as a detective. The duty of every good citizen to whose knowledge certain facts in regard to a crime, or the perpetration of a crime, have come, is to place those facts before the properly constituted authorities. Were other members of the community to act as I had acted, there would soon be an end of law and order in England. Disagreeable as the task might be, my duty clearly was to acquaint New Scotland Yard with the facts which had come to my knowledge, and to New Scotland Yard I accordingly went. Too often, however, in this world, a moral cold douche is the first recognition which is accorded to the zeal of a newly-awakened conscience. To Scotland Yard I went, brimming with information, but Scotland Yard—as represented by the official whom I interviewed—was not sympathetic. Scotland Yard, in point of fact, listened to me with an air of amused boredom, and then yawned openly in my face, after which Scotland Yard scratched my name and address upon a sheet of paper, intimated that my communication should have its serious attention, bowed me out, and

apparently straightway dismissed the matter from its august consideration.

From my consideration the matter could not so easily be dismissed, for, knowing as I did, that Norman and his crew of scoundrels might at any moment make an attempt to carry off Miss Fairfax, I felt that she must be warned of the danger in which she stood.

And here I must confess that I did wrong in not taking Lady Hampton into my confidence. As Miss Fairfax's hostess, she was to some extent responsible for the safety of her guest, and by not acquainting her with the facts, I failed conspicuously in my duty. My only excuse is that I was passionately in love, and that the thought of sharing my secret with the loved one—and with the loved one only—was very sweet to me. Joyce might, or might not, elect to acquaint her hostess with the facts, but in the meantime she and I would be brought together by the knowledge of a common understanding, and should she decide to keep the matter to herself, I should have an excuse ready to hand for the frequent exchange of confidences.

My sister and Lady Hampton were such close friends that Joyce and I met nearly every day, but the frequency of our meeting did nothing to forward my wooing. There

were occasions when the natural sweetness of Miss Fairfax's disposition prevailed over her prejudices, and at these times she would treat me with a certain approach to kindness, but as a rule her attitude towards myself was one of implacable hostility. She would neither engage in conversation with me herself, nor take part in any conversation in which I bore a share, so that I found no opportunity of leading up to the subject upon which I wished to speak. On the one occasion when the mysterious disappearance of Lady Southborne—which was still under discussion in the newspapers—was mentioned by me in Miss Fairfax's presence, she rose to go.

"If you and Mr. Rissler have nothing more agreeable to talk of than these horrid police court matters," she said to Lady Hampton, "I think I'll run down into the town to see whether there are any new novels at the library."

"It is a disagreeable subject, Joyce," replied Lady Hampton severely, "but you must remember, dear, that it is a subject which affects us all, for none of us knows whose turn it may be next."

It was not very long before the three of us had cause to remember those words.

CHAPTER XIII

RUNNING AMOK ON A MOTOR

"NORMAN! Great heavens! Norman!" My sister and I were standing at the counter of the chief post office of St. Albans as I spoke. She was waiting to be served with some letter cards, and I had walked to the window to look at a heavily built motor-car which was lumbering up the hill at a rate that threatened to jerk the thing's very heart out.

Idle curiosity, nothing more, had drawn me to the window, but when I saw that the driver of the car was the one man whom I now seemed fated at every turn to meet, I was out of the door and in the wake of the unwieldy, wobbly, waggon-load of wickedness before my poor sister could collect her scattered wits.

This was no mere coincidence. Norman's presence in St. Albans meant mischief, and in all probability mischief to Miss Fairfax, for had he come hither in search of myself, he was not likely to have driven thus boldly through the town. He was travelling at

such speed that he had reached the *Chequers Inn* before I was clear of the post office, but I was just in time to see him swing the clumsy car round at right angles, and when I reached the corner, he was whizzing up St. Peter's Street.

My first year's schooling had been at the ancient Grammar School in the Lady Chapel of the Abbey, and it was but a dozen yards from this very street that I had won the half-mile handicap in the school sports. On that occasion, as on this, I started at scratch, and —such tricks does memory play us!—the boy of ten seemed to come to life again in the man of thirty, and it would not have surprised me had I found myself clad in running jersey and knee breeches and heard again the shouts of "Go it, Rissler!" "Stick to it young 'un!" "White and pink wins! Hurrah for white and pink!"

The body cannot jump the years as easily as can the memory, and at such a pace had I spurted, that by the time I had passed St. Peter's Church, I was painfully reminded of the fact that a score of years make a considerable difference in the matter of one's wind. Had not a flock of sheep played providence for my benefit, it is doubtful whether I should have succeeded in overhauling Norman, who was travelling at

great speed. Fortunately for me he pulled up until the flock had gone by, and this gave me my chance. The motor was a sort of gig, built to hold four persons—two behind and two in front. The occupants of the front seats would have to sit with their backs to the backs of those sitting behind, who would be slightly on a lower level; and as Norman was the only person in the car, and was not aware that he was being followed, I waited until his attention was distracted by the sheep, and then, very quietly, slipped up and seated myself upon the footboard. Had he been driving a horse and trap, the addition of my weight must have tilted the shafts, and so led to my being discovered, but in the case of a heavy motor car, an extra passenger makes little or no difference.

It was fortunate for me that I was able thus to slip aboard unseen until I had recovered my breath, for I should have fared badly had the circumstances made it necessary for me, then and there, to try conclusions with Norman. As it was, I lay with my heart thumping an accompaniment to the throb-throb of the motor-car, which itself seemed about to expire from a bad attack of palpitation. By the time we reached Barnard's Heath, my pulse was beating evenly again, so noiselessly drawing up my legs upon

the footboard, I gathered myself together, and, at a bound, was over the back of the car, and seated beside Norman in the front.

It was a foolish act on my part, for, in his fright, he jerked the steering wheel so violently that the car ran into a bank and tilted over, spilling the pair of us into a heap of lump granite which the County Council had dumped down by the wayside for road-repairing purposes, though in this particular instance the granite was more like to break pates than to mend roads. Norman came off comparatively unhurt, but I received a blow on the head that partially stunned me and was, I am inclined to think, not a little responsible for what subsequently happened. "Knocked silly" as I was, however, I was not so silly as to fail to see that Norman was in a state of panic. Scrambling up from the stones, he essayed to make a bolt of it, but scarcely had he succeeded in showing a clean pair of heels, before I was up and after him, like a cat after a mouse. In the game of cat and mouse he stood no chance with me, seeing which he stopped running.

"It's no good, Mr. Rissler!" he whined. "You've done me this time—I'll throw up the sponge, though how you tracked me here I can't think."

"I think you're wise," I assented, wiping away the blood that was trickling down my forehead into my eyes. "You won the last rubber, Norman, but this time I think the odd trick's mine."

"What are you going to do with me?" he asked.

"Take you to the police station."

"Here or in London?"

"Here, decidedly. My mistake on the last occasion was not making sure of you while I could. You were one too many for me on that occasion, or rather, three too many, for you wouldn't have tied me up like a cloak-room parcel as you did on that occasion if you hadn't had two pals to help you."

The dog-like smile-and-snarl contortion passed over his face, and then he said—

"What about the motor car? It's only a hired one, but I daresay the police wouldn't mind my arranging to get it sent back. Besides we're some way from the town, and may as well ride back as walk, especially as you're looking a bit faint after your tumble. I don't think the thing's injured. If you'd help me to hoist it on four wheels again, we could get back much quicker, and certainly in greater comfort."

I was rather glad of the suggestion, for I

had lost a good deal of blood from the cut on my head, and was, as Norman said, a trifle faint. Moreover I should feel surer of my prisoner, were he and I perched up on a motor car together, than were we trudging along a country road. It was possible that his accomplices might be lurking in the neighbourhood, and were we to meet them, my position on the car would give me an advantage which I should not have were they to set upon me while I was afoot. Moreover the fresh current of air which we should encounter by the rapid movement of the motor would soon pull me round, so, nothing loth, I lent Norman a hand to set the ugly thing upon four wheels again, and soon we were whizzing back to St. Albans in fine style.

"Am I to go straight to the police station?" he asked.

"Yes," I said, "it's in Chequer Street. St. Peter's Street, Chequer Street and Holywell Hill are all in a line almost. It's to the left of the Town Hall."

"Is the Town Hall that green-grey stuccoed bastard abomination which reminds one of the hideous family vaults that they used to put in cemeteries?" he asked.

"That's the building," I said. "If you'll make for that noble piece of architecture,

and then steer to the left of it, we shall be at the police station in no time."

Two minutes passed almost in silence, for Norman was busy with the steering apparatus and returned short preoccupied answers when I addressed him. Meantime it seemed to me that the pace at which we were travelling had become greatly accelerated, and I was about to speak to him on the subject, when he muttered under his breath something that sounded very like an oath, and turning to me, said—

"Do you understand anything about the mechanism of motor cars?"

"Not a bit."

"I'm not much wiser," he answered. "Doesn't it seem to you that we're going at a great speed?"

"It does. I was just about to say so when you spoke."

All this time Norman had been too occupied to look about him, but as he did so now, and saw at what a pace the objects in the roadside rushed past us, his anxiety seemed to increase.

"I hope to heaven nothing got jammed in that turn-over," he said. "I don't fancy a spill while we are going at this rate. It would be more than serious, but I've been trying for the last two minutes to slow the

wretched thing down, and nothing seems to take any effect. Will you have a try ? "

" My good man," I said, " I've never been on a car before, and I never was the slightest good at anything connected with machinery. My intervention would probably result in blowing the whole show sky high—— Hi ! Look out ! "

The car had got upon a footpath, flanked by a brick wall, that runs to the left of the *Cricketers' Inn,* and a collision seemed so inevitable that Norman lost his nerve. Letting go the steering wheel, he threw himself back in his seat, with hands outspread, bufferwise, before him, to break the force of the expected impact.

During the psychological moment in which our fates hung in the balance, I made a hasty calculation in regard to the exact spot upon which I should strike when thrown forward. So near were we, that I distinctly saw a tiny insect, no bigger than a pinhead, creep out at that very moment, and upon that very spot, from a chink in the wall ; and I remember thinking to myself that the little speck of a creature would have done well to have timed his outing a few moments later.

Fortunately for the two insects—the human as well as the other—for the brick wall was no less likely to prove to me a demarcation-

line between this world and the next, than the advent of my body, when thrown from the car, was likely to eclipse the sun in the wee beetle's world—the wheel of the motor just grazed the wall, and then sheered off into the road, where Norman once more resumed command. Up to this point he had not seemed greatly alarmed in regard to the consequences of our ride, but this had been so narrow a squeak that the perspiration was trickling down his face from under his peaked leather cap.

"I don't know how I managed that," he said apologetically. "I thought we were done for, and I'm afraid I lost my head a bit. So long as we can keep her head straight, and don't run into anything, we shall be all right, for the petrol will be giving out directly, and then the thing will stop of itself—not that I see any sign of its doing so at present."

He was right. There was no such sign. We passed St. Peter's Church at a rate at which St. Peter's Church has never been passed before, for we had scarcely steered into mid-channel at the end where the ancient thoroughfare, to which the Church gives its name, broadens, as the Thames broadens as it nears the sea, when we were at the other end. This time we did not linger to admire the Town Hall, about the architectural beauty

of which Norman had delivered himself so vehemently, but steered for Chequer Street, and hurtled by that haven where one of us at least wished to be—the police station—in a style which must have established a record in the matter of "furious driving."

I write lightly about my eventful drive now that it is all over, but I can assure the reader that at the time it was no laughing matter. For in front of us, as I well knew, lay one of the steepest declivities to be seen in the centre of any town of Hertfordshire.

"Steer to the left! Steer to the left, Norman!" I shouted. "There's Holywell Hill in front of us, and we shall crumple up like a paper boat if we attempt it at this pace."

"I can't! I can't!" he yelled. "The steering gear's got jammed in some way now. It was twisted, I expect, in the upset. We *must* go straight on!"

As the motor felt the first drop in the hill, she seemed to dive forward, as a seal dives into the water, rather than to take it—as a Christian carriage should—on four wheels. I don't know how Norman felt, but I know that the pit of my stomach seemed to fall away, and then to double up like a hollow india-rubber ball, crushed between one's two hands. I was conscious of some such feeling

of physical sickness as an unaccustomed landsman feels when a ship plunges head foremost into the trough of the sea. Our speed was terrific; the vibration so intense that I now felt as if all the organs that were packed away between my ribs had got shaken out of their place, and were being jumbled about together like dice in a box. And now we seemed to be rushing through the air on wings—to be tobogganing down a slope—rather than to be running on wheels. The dust was choking, the noise deafening. The motor was no longer a machine. It was a devil-driven stallion, stampeding for hell—a living creature, madly, insanely, infuriately drunk. Sometimes it seemed to my excited fancy to take the road at a jump, kicking meanwhile like a bucking horse, and every second I expected to find it describing a somersault by flinging the hind wheels forward over our head. And all the time it reeled and swayed from side to side, the iron heart of it no longer beating as a man's heart beats in his breast, but whirring like the broken spring of a clock, and going faster every moment until the solid ground seemed to fall away beneath us like water.

"Is the road straight at the bottom of the hill?" screamed Norman in my ear.

"No," I shouted. "It turns, and, unless

you can steer, we shall dash into the brick wall of the North Western station."

"I can't steer," he bellowed. "Our only chance for life is to climb over upon the back seat, and drop off behind. You go first. I'll follow."

Scarcely knowing what I did, for I was still dazed and weak from the blood I had lost from the cut on my head, I clambered over upon the back seat, lowered myself till my feet were near the ground, and then made a desperate attempt to save myself from a serious fall by clinging to the back of the car and running behind.

I might as well have tried to run behind the Flying Scotchman, for in an instant I was dragged off my feet and flung violently to the ground, bruised and shaken, but otherwise not seriously injured. Rubbing the dust from my eyes, I scrambled up to see whether Norman's attempt to alight were attended with greater success.

Imagine my chagrin to see that the car had already slackened speed, for Norman now had his hand upon the lever which regulated the pace at which the vehicle travelled, and as he approached the curve in the road where the wall of the North Western station presents such danger to runaway carriages, he shifted his hand to the steering wheel

and guided the car around the curve as easily as a practised horseman winds his mount in and out of the traffic on a main thoroughfare. Then as the car began to climb St. Stephen's Hill, he turned in his seat, and waved his hand patronizingly in my direction.

So I had been duped—"fooled," as they say, "to the top of my bent!" And I, poor fool—had been hugging myself all the time at having so cleverly, as I thought, got even with Norman. But was the game lost?

It has been said of the Englishman—and truly—that he never knows when he is beaten. It is magnificent—that sullen, silent stubbornness with which an Englishman will stand still to be fired at. In all the world there is no nationality which can play a losing game with such desperate dogged endeavour. *That*, we who are of Irish blood must ungrudgingly grant. But I venture to think that the Irishman (and therein is perhaps the reason why he excels in the art of war) is more resourceful, is quicker to think and quicker to act.

An Englishman finding himself in a place so tight that any one but a denizen of the British Isles would decide at once that there was nothing for it but surrender or retreat, says, "Here I am and here I'll stick to be shot at till I'm killed or relief comes!"

An Irishman in the same place would say: "It's the devil's own hole I'm in. But wait now! What way'll I be getting out?"

And if I venture to add, "Get out the resourceful Irishman generally does," I shall not, I hope, be accused of either national or personal vanity. To say that the Irishman is resourceful—so resourceful sometimes that his resourcefulness might better be described as slipperiness—is merely to state incontrovertible fact. Anyhow, on this occasion the Irishman was prompt to act.

CHAPTER XIV

BICYCLE *VERSUS* MOTOR

NOT a hundred yards from the spot where I stood watching Norman being borne heavenwards, Elijah-like, in a chariot of fire and smoke, was a shop where bicycles were let out on hire, and thither I hurried. The bell over the door was apparently so taken by surprise at the haste with which I burst my way into the shop, that, like a soldier who fires one shot and then flings down his gun to run away, it clashed a strident peal, and then fell, panic-stricken and fluttering like a wounded bird, at my feet.

"Shop!" I called loudly and wonderingly, for the fall of the bell seemed to me to have made noise enough to bring the tumble-down place about my ears. There was no answer. I heard the echo of my own voice, and I heard the dying heart-vibrations of the bell which (reversing the ordinary rule) quickened instead of slowed its heart-beats as it neared the end, and then ceased suddenly, a thin wedge of sound driven into the silence. I turned my head to

the right and to the left, straining first one ear and then the other, in the hope of hearing some one stirring, either overhead or behind the shop. Evidently there was no one in.

"Oh, very well!" I said aloud, "I must help myself, and come back afterwards and settle with the bicycle man, who is so full of business that he leaves his shop to look after itself."

I threw my leg over a cycle that, with the tyres ready inflated, stood near the door. "Might have been built for me," I said. "Let me just make sure that the pump works. Yes, it's all right. You've got a long start, Mr. Norman, but, as the hymn has it, I'm 'following in the train.'"

The next instant I was in the saddle, and on the road. For all I saw of the country through which I passed on that record-making ride, I might have been a prisoner doing his turn on the treadmill, instead of a man of observant habit, cycling through leafy Hertfordshire. The pace at which I travelled was so great that the landscape unfurled on either side like the scroll of some huge painted panorama. Farms and cottages and country houses, grey-towered churches and way-side inns, furze-covered common, hedge-bordered high roads, and flocks of geese parading fussily on village-greens, slid evenly

by me, as, pedalling for dear life, and with eyes strained ever ahead, I wheeled on and on in eager pursuit of Norman.

As I topped St. Stephen's Hill I learned that a motor-car had recently gone that way, making at a great pace for Watford. Down went my head between my shoulders at the news, till I must have looked for all the world like a playful ram or butting goat, ducking for the charge. As for the two legs of me, the tune they played upon the pedals was fast enough to have made the " bearings " smoke. It was a case of " neck or nothing," for, wound up to go as I was, I could not have stopped within a score of yards. One might as well have tried to check a comet in full career, and had I turned a corner to find a regiment of cavalry, a herd of cattle, or a furniture pantechnicon blocking the road, I should have had no option but to take the obstruction at full charge.

Luckily for me, however, and perhaps for the cows, the cavalry regiment, or the pantechnicon (for I am forced to the melancholy conclusion that the reckless cyclist, no less than the drunkard, must be counted among those whom a special, if inscrutable, Providence protects), no such obstacle presented itself, and when at last I reached a long stretch of level road, and saw a cloud of dust whirling

along about a mile ahead of me, I hardly knew how to contain myself.

"Gone away! Tally-ho! Yoicks, forward!" I sang, with what little breath was left in my body, and away my wheel and I whirled together at break-neck speed. Another five minutes' riding, or rather propulsion, through space, was enough to satisfy me that I was upon the right track. The cloud of dust in front was undoubtedly caused by a motor-car, and soon I was near enough to see, to hear, and to smell it, and, what was more, to identify the driver as Norman. He had turned to glance over his shoulder—not apprehensively, as if fearing pursuit, but casually, and with the confidence of one who is assured that he has made good his retreat—and the drop of dismay upon the face of him, on catching sight of me, was comical to behold.

I had hoped that once I had overtaken Norman, the rest would be easy, but now I found that the worst of the encounter was to come. The motor was not travelling at a great rate, but seeing who was upon his heels, or rather upon his wheels, he shouted at me angrily—I could not catch the words—and grabbing at the regulator, switched it round to full speed. Winded as I was, I did not fancy entering for yet another "long event" in the day's programme. Of chariot

racing I had had enough, so, by a prodigious spurt, I managed to draw up level with Norman, in the hope of heading him off. A terrior dog might as well have hoped to head off a goods train, a rowing skiff a steamer, for had we come to the crash I knew that the odds were a diamond ring against a bone collar stud in favour of my being thrown with a broken rib and buckled wheels, while he rode off uninjured and triumphant.

It was, to quote Sir Walter Scott, a case in which—

> "The partridge may the falcon mock
> If that slight palfrey stand the shock."

Veering off slightly I spurted past him, and rode on ahead in the hope of finding something—a plank, the branch of a tree, or a gate off its hinges, that I might, by a quick dismount, snatch up and thrust between the motor's wheels. Surmising what I was after, he headed straight for me at full speed, with the intention, I could see, of running me down. As, looking over my shoulder, I saw him coming at me, I was reminded, even in that moment, of the Military Tournament at the Agricultural Hall, and of the onrush of man and horse upon the trooper on foot, in the duel of lance *versus* bayonet.

Fortunately for me the road was wide, and my cycle being much lighter and more

manageable than his cumbrous car, I dodged his rushes as easily as a bull is dodged by a greyhound. Once or twice, indeed, he came near to spilling himself and smashing the motor by overturning it into a hedge, in the viciousness with which he strove to run me down. Realizing that this was a game in which I was having the better of it, he suddenly swung the motor round and made off in the direction whence we had come. It was a good move, for straight in front of him lay a steep hill, and, excellent machine though my mount was, a bicycle would have stood no chance against a petroleum-driven motor when we came to hill-climbing. But a motor cannot be turned in its own length as a bicycle can, and the time he lost in making the circuit gave me my chance. I was by him like a lightning flash, and, leaping from the saddle, planted myself in the middle of the road, to await his coming. That he meant making a rush of it, I could see—running me down ruthlessly where I stood if I got in the way, or steering clear of me, and so making good his escape, if I gave him half a chance. I did not budge an inch until the motor was close upon me, and then I slipped out of my coat in a jiffy, and, jumping aside, slashed it across his eyes as he hurtled by.



"In another moment I had Norman out of it and upon his back."

The Jackal] [Page 2

For a moment it was touch and go whether my stratagem failed or succeeded; but even had I failed, I had not staked my all upon the cast, for I still had my machine, and should ride all the lighter without my coat. But the bow which I had drawn thus at a venture was so fortunate as to send its arrow to the bullseye. I had held the coat by one sleeve when I whipped it at him, and the other sleeve so coiled itself around his neck that he had to let go the steering wheel to free himself. In that moment the motor swerved sufficiently from the "straight" for the next two or three revolutions of the wheel to bring it to the side of the road, where the thing stranded itself high and dry by running half way up a bank, and in another moment I had Norman out of it, and upon his back.

"Game and sett!" I said boastfully.

And it looked like it; for when in a tussle between two men, the one flings the other to the ground, his knuckles hitched under the prostrate man's chin, his knee-bone playing the bagpipes so effectually upon the poor devil's chest, that the last bubble of breath seems to have squealed out of his body—when all this happens, the game is generally as good as lost to the bottom man.

"Game and sett," I said again, corkscrewing my hand into Norman's collar, until his

eyes goggled, and his silly tongue lolled helplessly against his under-lip, like a drunkard lolling against a wall. "So you thought to make mincemeat of me, did you?—you and your murderous motor-car," I shouted, shaking him vigorously. "Ugh! you ruffian, I've a precious mind to strangle you where you lie."

The dance he had led me, will stand as sufficient excuse in the eyes of some of my readers for the ungentle handling I accorded him. When two men come to the encounter, blows—and hard blows—are expected and exchanged; but the boastful flinging of hard words at a fallen enemy is not a manly exercise, and looking back on what happened, it seems to me as if I had tempted Fate to my own undoing.

In the duel which had taken place between the bicycle and the motor car, we had turned aside into a lane which ran at right angles to the high road. Here for the first half minute of our tussle we had rolled over and over like two dogs, each striving to worry the life out of the other. Then, as the reader knows, I had come out on top, and had I been content to accept my victory unboastingly, that eventful encounter might have had a very different ending.

At the very moment when I was taunting

Norman with his defeat, a man, riding a bicycle, flashed past along the high road at racing speed. He was looking straight in front of him, and but for my shout would never have noticed us, but, at the sound of my voice, he turned his head, and saw the motor and the bicycle, as well as Norman and myself upon the ground.

He shouted something at us and then disappeared along the high road, for he had gone too far to turn his bicycle in our direction. The next half-minute, however, he came running round the corner wheeling his machine with one hand. Then resting it against a gate, he rushed suddenly at me, and struck me with all his force behind the ear. Being quite unprepared for the onslaught, I was unable to defend myself, and was felled by the blow, seeing which he leapt upon me to hold me down, shouting lustily for help meanwhile.

Supposing him, as I did, to be one of Norman's confederates, I was not a little surprised that he should summon assistance, for whereas the odds were now two to one against me, the arrival of outsiders would equalize matters again. For myself I asked nothing better than that the fellow's crying should be heard, and help arrive, in which case I should explain the situation to the new-comers, and call upon them to aid me in detaining master

as well as man, pending the advent of the police; and so might have the fortune to see this pair of rascals clapped into jail before the day was out.

I was soon undeceived, however.

"I've caught you, have I, you blackguardly bicycle thief!" he said, gripping me very much as I had previously gripped Norman. "Sneak my best wheel in open daylight when my back was turned for a minute, would you! Yes, and if I hadn't been coming down the hill just in time to see you come out of the shop, and ride off, you'd have got clean away with it—same as you did with the other one I lost. But you're bagged at last, my prison-bird, and you'll get your wings clipped to the tune of penal servitude, for it looks to me as if you are a highway robber as well as a bicycle thief, by the way you were treating this gentleman here."

"Oh, this is too ridiculous," I spluttered as soon as I could get a word in. "It is quite true that I took the bicycle out of your shop. I have no wish or intention to deny doing so. But this man is a notorious criminal and as I'm occupied in detective work, I have been tracking him down. He gave me the slip at St. Albans, and got away in a motor car. I rushed into your shop to hire a bicycle, but couldn't make anybody hear, so, as every

moment was precious, I took the liberty of helping myself, meaning to bring back the machine, explain the circumstance, and square up this very day."

The fellow grinned. "That's a likely yarn. What do you say to it, sir?" he asked, turning to Norman who had now risen and was leaning, looking somewhat white and faint, against a gate.

"I can only say that I'm very much indebted to you for coming to my assistance as you did," replied that worthy. "I don't know what would have happened to me if you hadn't come up. And your estimate of the fellow is no doubt quite accurate. He is clearly a common footpad, or rather, I should say, a cycling highway robber as well as a bicycle thief, and he seems to be as cunning and clever as he is brazen-faced. But fortunately these glib rascals always overreach themselves by their own cleverness. He must think you to be as foolish as he thinks himself clever, to pitch a yarn like that about his being a detective in search of a criminal. That detective dodge has been played too often by these gentry, but personating a detective is an indictable offence upon which the police courts have come down very heavily lately. I should be very much surprised if this fellow isn't wanted for some-

thing worse than that, judging by my experience. I'm a doctor—Doctor Stephen MacArthur—and I'm on my way to see an old patient who has wired me to come immediately. This fellow here steered right in front of me, and in trying not to run him down, I ran the motor into the hedge as you see. He was very polite, said it was an accident—that the motor made him nervous, and that he'd lost his presence of mind, and turned the steering bar in the wrong direction. I'm ashamed to say that I wasn't so sharp as you are, and was fool enough to believe his plausible tale, and when he offered to assist me in getting the motor off the rocks—if I may so speak—I accepted his assistance with thanks. Then, when I was stooping down—never suspecting treachery of any sort—to make sure that the wheel was not jammed, he seized me by the throat, threw me back upon the ground and said he'd murder me if I didn't hand over my watch and chain and valuables. And I believe he'd have done it if you hadn't come up. I wish I could stop and help you to transfer him to police custody, but there's been too much time lost already, and I dare not risk my patient's life by a moment's unnecessary delay. Suppose I help you to tie his hands and feet so as to make sure of him. Then, if you will lend me a

hand with the motor, I shall be in the village in a few minutes, and will call at the police station and send a constable along. I'll give evidence at the court of course—it's one's duty as a good citizen to see that a dangerous criminal of this sort doesn't go unpunished. Coming away in a hurry in response to my patient's urgent wire I forgot my card case, but my name is MacArthur—Dr. Stephen MacArthur, of 58A, Harley Street, W. See, I'll write it on this half sheet of paper for you. Be sure to tell the police to communicate with me. He must stand his trial for highway robbery, if not for attempted murder, as well as for bicycle theft. Now, suppose we tie him up."

"I charge you, in the King's name not to let that villain get away!" I shouted excitedly to the bicycle man. "If you do, you'll be a party to the escape of a notorious criminal, and I shall hold you responsible for what's happened. Let me up, and help me to secure him, or, at all events detain the two of us till the police come, and then you'll see who's right and who's wrong. You'll never regret it if you do, and I'll see that you're well paid."

"Let you up!" said he, "not me! I've had enough of record-breaking for one day. You'll see I'm paid—will you? That's

thoughtful—yes, and I'll see that you're paid, my buck, and paid handsome. You'll hold me responsible, will you? Hold away! In the meantime I'll be responsible for keeping a precious tight hold on you. And I shan't be no party to the escape of a notorious criminal. You make yourself easy about that—you dirty bicycle-sneaker you! That's right, doctor! Pull it tight. Once we've got his ankles strapped, we shan't have much trouble with him."

It was more than humiliating, it was heartbreaking, thus to be made a prisoner by the very man on whom I had hoped that day to see the handcuffs. Faint as I was with loss of blood, and exhausted by my record ride, I was no match for two pair of hands, and struggle as I might, my pinioning was soon accomplished.

"For God's sake don't let that man go!" I shouted, as I saw the two turn their attention to getting the stranded motor car off the rocks, to use Norman's phrase. "I swear, as God is my witness, that he is the villain who is responsible for the infamous abduction of women with which the country is ringing. It's all a clever lie about his being a doctor going to see a patient. Ask him who his patient is, and don't let him get away till his statement has been put to the test or till mine

has. Or detain him till you have communicated with my sister, Mrs. Cottingdean, of the Lodge, London Road, St. Albans, or with Lady Hampton, of Hampton House. Or send to Dr. Eugene Nutcombe of Holywell Hall, or to Mr. W. J. Harvy of Spenser House, London Road. They are friends of mine and will bear me out."

I was watching the bicycle man closely, and saw that for the moment his eyes widened. The names I had mentioned were of course well known to him, and, judging by the expression of his face, I was led to hope that at last he was asking himself the question, "Can it be possible that this man's story, which up to now I have scouted as too preposterous even to consider, is true after all?"

Norman was, however, watching him no less narrowly than I, and made haste to dispel the uneasiness which my words had created.

"Yes," he said, with an assumption of merriment so real and apparently so spontaneous that it would have deceived a quicker-witted observer than the man for whose benefit it was enacted: "Yes, and why not go on to Lord Salisbury, at Hatfield House? It's only five miles further, or to Lord Verulam, or to any of the other gentlemen whose names are to be found in the directory, which he's evidently been studying

to such purpose. 'Pon my word, it's as good as a play to listen to this fellow's bounce. He deserves to be let get away—and get away he will if we give him half a chance, for I believe he'd wriggle out of the hangman's hands on the scaffold—if only for the sake of his impudence."

Then he turned to the other with a swift change from contemptuous merriment to angry hauteur.

" Come, sir ! I can see with half an eye that you are inclined to credit this fellow's story. That is to say that you take the word of a rascal whom you *know* to be a bicycle thief against the word of a gentleman whom, with your own eyes, you saw him trying to rob, if not to murder. I owe it to my patient, and to my reputation as a doctor, to push on without another moment's delay, but if you say that you prefer to take this trickster's word against mine, I'll stay and have the whole matter thrashed out in public, and you shall be made to answer for the affront you have put upon a justice of the peace and a gentleman. Answer me. Do you or do you not believe this fellow's story ? "

" No, sir ! " answered the other hesitatingly. " I only thought that——"

" Very well," said Norman pompously, and with a magisterial hand-wave of dismissal,

" that's enough. I wish to hear no more of it. You've got my name—Dr. Stephen MacArthur, 58A, Harley Street. I shall myself communicate with the police immediately I leave my patient. Meanwhile I counsel you to lose no time in getting that fellow into custody. I shall drive straight to the police station now."

The next moment—my furious protests notwithstanding—he had mounted the motor and driven away.

He kept his word in the matter of calling, or at all events of sending a message to the police station, for ten minutes had barely passed before a member of the Hertfordshire County Constabulary came hurrying up.

" Mornin', Mr. Jenkins ! " he said to the bicycle man, who responded with a hearty—

" Is that you, Mr. Atkins. I'd clean forgotten you was the officer who's stationed in the village. You're wanted here, and badly. Case of a bicycle thief——"

" Nothing of the sort, constable," I interrupted. " My name's Rissler, Max Rissler, and I'm——"

" Stop a moment ! " interpolated the officer. " It's my duty to warn you that anything you say will be taken down and may be used in evidence against you."

Then he took out a note-book and pro-

ceeded to make an entry solemnly and in staccato—

"The prisoner . . . having been warned : : : then made . . . the . . . following statement . . . (Yes—got that down.) . . . 'My . . . name . . . is . . . Max . . . Risler.' How d'you spell Rissler, please?"

"Oh! stop this tomfoolery!" I shouted furiously. "While you are drivelling over that note-book, one of the worst criminals in England is making good his escape."

Then I told my story, or attempted to tell it, for not all the eloquence of all the detective novelists in Christendom could drag that hidebound idiot from his miserable note-book. I did my best to get him to listen to my statement — begged, threatened, tried to bribe, cursed, and would have struck him, had it been within my power—but all I could get out of him was—

"Stop a bit! Stop a bit! not so fast! I have only got the first sentence down yet."

Then in despair, I gave it up and relapsed into gloomy silence while my captors commandeered a cart from a neighbouring farm and, lifting me up as I was, drove me back to St. Albans as if I had been a disabled horse that, with his legs lashed together at the fetlocks, is carted away to the knacker's yard, there to be transformed into cat's meat.

Norman's nationality I did not and do not know, but clearly this game had not ended in a score for the quick-brained, resourceful Irishman.

CHAPTER XV

IN WHICH THE HEROINE ASSAULTS THE POLICE

WE are an impossible race, we Irish. The reason why the Englishman and the Irishman so constantly fall out and misunderstand each other is that an Irishman, a typical Irishman, has certain defects of temperament which are accounted peculiarly feminine. He is not inferior to the Englishman in courage, in endurance or in manly qualities; but he has a streak of that curious unreasoning and illogical perverseness, which we expect and make allowance for in our womankind, but which we do not expect and are not disposed to make allowance for in the other sex. Hence the Englishman and the Irishman are perpetually at logger-heads, for of all nations there is none less "understanding," less quick to notice and make allowance for racial peculiarities than the English.

When an Englishman finds that an Irishman, an American, a Frenchman, or a German

does not see eye to eye with himself, it never occurs to him to ask himself, "Is it possible that I am wrong?" The fact that they do not think as he does, condemns them out of hand. He is right and they are wrong—that is the long and the short of it—and if they are not disposed to accept this view of the case, the sooner steps are taken to bring them to a proper way of thinking the better. I do not say that the Englishman has not good cause for his arrogance, for whether she be liked or disliked, feared or admired by other nations, England has at least the courage of her opinions, and when it comes to a tussle can generally manage to enforce those opinions upon other nations. Nor do I say that the Englishman is greatly to be blamed for the total failure to understand the racial peculiarities of the Irish. We Irish are, as I have already said, an impossible race, and we are as impossible often to our best friends as to our worst enemies.

Twice on the eventful day of which I am writing, the game had been in my own hands and for the fact that in both instances I had failed to bring it to a successful issue I have only myself to blame. Looking back now on the closing act of that eventful day's drama, I realize that only an Irishman would have shown such absolute "cussedness," or

have taken so extraordinary a course as that which I took.

The vehicle on which I was being conveyed to St. Albans jail—that haven to which I had hoped ere the day had been out, safely to have steered Norman—was, I believe, a greengrocer's cart, a sort of four-wheeled truck without sides or back. The point about it, to which I most took objection, was that the unfortunate occupant was exposed to the public gaze. On the unfrequented country high road this did not greatly matter, but in passing through a village, two miles from St. Albans, we not unnaturally attracted some attention. The spectacle of a grown man lying full length upon a coster's cart, with his legs lashed together and his arms tied behind his back, while his captors sat in front, engaged in conversation and in the consumption of shag tobacco, was a sight not every day to be witnessed. A visitor who took the air thus publicly, and in so unusual a manner, was clearly of some importance; and I had no cause to complain of apathy on the part of the inhabitants of the village in question.

And so we journeyed toward St. Albans—I, bound hand and foot, like a victim about to be offered up on the altar, while a troop of fiendish children, recently let loose from

school, ran hooting on either side of my chariot, or scudded on in front to climb a gate whence they might refresh their eyes anew by the sight of a helpless human being in distress. I was particularly struck by the malignity of the girls. The boys were content to constitute themselves into an impromptu band, and to precede the procession, playing imaginary drums and fifes; but whenever a hand was raised to fling a stone or to strike slyly at me with a switch—that hand was surely the hand, not of brutal boyhood, but of gentle girlhood.

When we were about a mile from St. Albans, the last and bitterest drop was added to the cup of humiliation that I was fated to drink.

Raising my head to ascertain how near we were to the city, I saw coming towards us, a dogcart in which was seated the one woman in all the world by whom I was most anxious not to be seen—Joyce Fairfax. I knew that she and Lady Hampton intended to take a drive that afternoon, and as Joyce was by herself in the dogcart, and was walking the horse, I guessed that she was waiting for Lady Hampton who had probably called to make an inquiry at one of the cottages on the high road. Anyhow, Joyce it was, and what was more, she was coming towards us and was already craning

her neck to discover the meaning of the uproar.

Seeing her interest in the approaching spectacle, and feeling, perhaps, that they in some sense shared its importance, inasmuch as they were "on in this scene," in the double rôle of prisoner's bodyguard and of Greek chorus, the horde of grinning, grimacing, gesturing girls set up new howls of derision, and struck again at me waspishly with switches or knotted scarves. As for me—my exasperation was so great that had one of the little vixens, in striking at me, adventured so much as a finger within reach of my teeth, I fear that not all my gallantry would have prevented me from snapping at it like a dog. Thus far I had borne my discomfiture with what I hoped was comparative and philosophical composure, but to find oneself paraded publicly—and most of all before the eyes of the woman one loved—as an object of contumely, was more than human flesh and blood could bear. If, before the dogcart reached us, a gulf had suddenly opened at our feet and taken myself, my captors and my girl-torturers, at one gulp, I would have gone down with a light heart. But to be carted like a "November Guy"—the spurned and scorned of shameless hoydens and yelling street-urchins, under the eyes of the one

woman in whose eyes I would fain appear a hero, was beyond endurance. As the dog-cart came nearer I switched my eyes from right to left in the hope of discovering some cranny into which I could thrust my head ostrichwise and so escape recognition. Near me on the cart was a piece of coarse sacking, and by a tremendous effort, I managed to shift my position so that my head was towards it. Then striking out with my feet against the board that served for a seat in the front of the cart, I pushed myself forward and thrust my head under the sacking.

It was all done so quickly that my face was well out of sight before the dogcart had drawn level with us, and but for the fact that I was once again the sport of the ill-luck which had so persistently dogged my movements that day, I might have been spared the final humiliation which I have now to record.

For a single second I had the consolation of knowing that my face was hidden, and I might yet escape recognition, but two seconds had not passed before I knew that once more my fate was trembling in the scales. In my frantic attempt to get my head "out of the picture," as the photographers say, I had jerked my body half out of the cart, and only by a desperate effort could I hope to recover my balance sufficiently to prevent my falling

out, perhaps under the feet of the horse that Joyce was driving. Had I been free to move my arms I could have saved myself, but being tied hand and foot I was helpless, and so pitched out—sack and all—upon my head.

"Oh! poor fellow! Poor fellow!" I heard Joyce's sweet voice say. "What are you doing to him? Who is he? What has he done that you are treating him in this brutal way? Lift him up, one of you, I am sure he must be hurt."

I did not wait for them to lift me, I did not wait for them to tell her what I had done, but jerking the sack from my face by a movement of my head, I rose to a sitting posture (tied as I was I could not succeed in getting upon my feet), and with the blood running into my mouth so that I could taste the iron in it, I looked up into Joyce's face and said in surprisingly even tones—

"Pray keep your pity for some more deserving object, Miss Fairfax. The man, about whom you are so good as to inquire, is a common thief who has been so unlucky as to be found out, and to be caught twice in one day in the very act of making off with other people's property, and is now, quite justly, being taken to St. Albans Police Station in charge of a constable."

Why I should thus publicly accuse myself

of crimes of which I knew myself to be innocent, I am to this day unable to explain. My action may have been due to a clot of blood on a Celtic brain ; it may have been due to the sheer perversity of the Irishman—for perverse, as I have already said, your Irishman generally is. You and he may amble along arm in arm together, the very picture of brotherly love and amiability. Nothing is farther from your thoughts than to step upon the toes of his prejudices, nothing seems farther from his than to seek occasion to quarrel. Misunderstand each other, you and he ? Why, the thing's impossible. Never was there a creature the hinges of whose mental machinery have been so equably lubricated by the oil of sweet reasonableness, never was human being so open to conviction as he. Meet you half way ? Not he, sure 'twould be a discourtesy of which he is incapable, to leave you to trudge even half the distance alone ! 'Tis himself must foot the whole of it to come to you, and maybe go a bit farther than you had yourself intended, if thereby he may spare the thought of a blister to the soles of your feet.

" And they call the Irishman impossible and unreasonable ! " you say, as you take a tighter grip of his arm that thereby you may bring your mouth closer to his ear in

the friendly confidences that he has invited. And then, maybe as you are speaking the very word of words which himself has given you every reason for believing will most please him, he has flung off your arm and is flaring out at you, eyes and voice of him fierce enough to knock you down. And for no earthly reason that he or you or any one else can explain, other than that the fuse of an Irishman's fury is always burning and may explode the mine at the very moment when he and you and the rest of the world least expected it.

To a man who knows Irishmen well, there need be no such uncertainty about the moment of explosion. It is as easy to anticipate the moment of an Irishman's wrath as it is to anticipate the moment at which the alarum clock which you have set to waken you at a certain hour will knock to discordant purpose upon the harmoniousness of your slumber. The rule by which you may learn to read the dial face of the alarum clock of an Irishman's anger is this: if there be one moment during the twenty-four hours which is peculiarly inopportune for an outbreak; if there be one moment when every reason which appeals to a reasonable man should most importune him to be silent, be sure always that that

moment and no other is the one which your impossible Irishman will choose.

Watch for the moment; not when there is most weighty reason for resentment, but when there is least, when, in fact, the subject of your chat has sunk to such trivial issue that you are hard put to it to disguise your yawn. That is the critical instant, and the mouth which you did but open for a comfortable yawn is like to remain open all awry and aghast in the intensity of your amazement.

'Tis an old and senseless gibe that the safest place during the firing practice of our Volunteer Forces is exactly in front of the target, but 'tis absolute fact that the time when you are most in danger from the powder magazine of an Irishman's anger is when neither light nor fire is near. Set a bonfire burning within a foot of the magazine and every faggot shall burn itself out into grey ash with never so much as a puff from a pinch of powder, but do but light your pipe at a distance of half a mile and the next moment you and your pipe are like to be knocked flat by an explosion that had you been nearer would have knocked you and your pipe sky-high.

Considering how frequently Irishmen make fools of themselves, it is a matter for wonder that an Irishman so often succeeds,

where a wiser man of other nationality fails. His own sheer folly may cause him to tumble out of a fifth floor window, but the odds are two to one that he lands on his feet.

"Distressful" country as Ireland may be, yet out of Ireland every Irishman has his chance—and more often than not, takes it. There is more than meets the eye in the ancient wheeze about the Irishman who, when boasting how much a sixpence would buy in his own country, was asked, "Why didn't you stop in your country then?" replied, "Because I hadn't got the saxpence, me jewel."

Perhaps not, and so long as he remained in his own country, poor Pat may never know the luxury of being able to say "bang goes saxpence!" Yet let him leave Ireland, although he carry out of it no more than an odd threepenny-bit stowed away in some corner of his pocket—an inspection of that same coin will prove that it has a hole bored somewhere in it "for luck." Lucky—happy-go-lucky if you like to have it so—your Irishman generally is, for his chance shot finds the bull's-eye where the most careful marksman's steady aim goes wide.

In my own case the event proved that had I spent a week in cudgelling my brains for some means whereby to regain the place I had lost in Miss Fairfax's favour, I might

never have hit upon anything so effectual as by proclaiming myself an object at which to point the finger of scorn.

In view of the marked and unmistakable aversion she had hitherto manifested, I might not unreasonably have expected that my downfall would be to her a source of satisfaction, but no sooner had the words, by which I admitted myself to be a thief, passed my lips, than she had constituted herself the most ardent champion of my honour.

My diagnosis of the case is that nothing could so effectually heal the wound which, when I first saw her, I had unwittingly inflicted upon her self-love than the sight of my own self-love being thus publicly wounded.

This may or may not have been the reason for the sudden change in her attitude towards myself. But why seek a reason? She was a woman. To say that, is to say all. That she had been startled to discover on whose behalf she had intervened, was clear from the fact that all the colour had left her face when I had bobbed up, Jack-in-the-box-like, and confronted her; but as she listened to my self-accusations, the colour had as suddenly returned.

Joyce was a woman of compelling personality, and it was upon her rather than upon me that the attention of those present was

fixed. There was a light in her eyes while I was speaking which boded ill for somebody, and my captors as well as the onlookers watched her face as the wayfarer caught in a storm watches the thunder cloud, out of which he expects every instant to see the lightning strike.

Then the storm burst.

"You are a policeman, I suppose?" she said, turning upon Atkins so suddenly and so fiercely that the fellow started back from her in his seat as if fearing that the words would be followed by a blow. Nor was his anxiety unjustified, for as Joyce spoke she clutched so savagely at the butt end of her whip that the pink of her knuckles paled. It was as if one had suddenly turned a handful of ripening white-heart cherries so that the rose of the sun-warmed side should be replaced by the cream of the side that lay next to the wall. Tighter still she clutched the whip-handle, and now her knuckles stood out like white nipples, for the delicate skin was strained over them like stretched satin.

"You are a member of the Hertfordshire police?" she said.

"Yes, miss. Yes, m' lady," stammered the uniformed one.

"If this is your usual method of conveying the sick or the injured to the hospital, I will see

to it that you are permitted to disgrace the force no longer. Sir Henry Hampton, who is Chairman of the County Bench, shall communicate with the Chief Constable on the subject. This gentleman, Mr. Rissler, is a friend of his and of mine."

Now that Joyce had declared herself, something of the electricity seemed to pass out of the atmosphere, and in passing, spent itself in a feeble cheer from the very girls who, a few minutes before, had made me run the gauntlet of their gibes.

"Yes, lydy," said one glib hoyden, evidently a cockney, hiding behind her back, as she spoke, the stick with which she had recently struck at me. "I seen 'em put the pore gentleman on the cart, and knew they was 'urtin' of 'im. Shime, aint it? That's 'im as done it—Mr. Jenkins. 'E keeps a bicycle shop. It's just opposite the 'orspital in 'Ollywell 'Ill. And the other one's the p'leeceman; Mr. Atkins' 'is name, lydy."

"Go away, every one of you," said Joyce imperiously, and to my surprise the company of my late tormentors slunk away to a respectful distance, whence they watched the proceedings greedily, open-mouthed.

"Take my horse's head!" she commanded the constable, throwing back the rug which covered her knees and preparing to alight.

The policeman, whom surprise had hitherto rendered inarticulate, obeyed her automatically.

"Beg pardon, m' lady, but I think there's a mistake somewhere," he said. "It's to the station, not to the 'orspital we're taking him. 'E aint an accident and 'e aint ill. 'E's a 'ighway robber and a bicycle thief, on his own confession."

"Yes, that's wot he is," interrupted the bicycle man insolently, jumping down to intercept Joyce who was evidently coming to my assistance. "And as for you, you're his 'accomplish,' that's wot you are. Lots of these swindler chaps 'as some sort o' flash woman working along with 'em, and I don't suppose you're no better than you ought to be! I dare say 'im and you——"

When the man began to speak, Joyce was standing up in the dog-cart, gathering her skirts together with one hand, so that she might get down, but, as she realized the import of his words, she snatched up the whip and struck at him with all her strength. The lash coiled, cobra-wise, around his neck, then, as Joyce threw back her arm to strike again, the thong unwound itself with a swiftness that sent him spinning like a whipped top. In a jiffey Joyce was out of the dog-cart and on her feet beside him. With the whip clubbed in her

hand, she rained blows so fast and so furiously upon his head and shoulders that the fellow fairly blubbered with fright, falling finally beneath the belly of the horse which—and small wonder—took fright. Unluckily for me the animal swerved right round, rearing madly, to where I lay.

I saw Joyce drop the whip and spring to the horse's head—heard a confused sound of shouting—and then suddenly the body, skull, and two sides of me seemed to crash all together as if stoved in like a crushed match-box—into a thousand sparks.

CHAPTER XVI

I FIND MYSELF IN HEAVEN

A PAPER bag, first blown out and then burst between a schoolboy's clapped palms, could have given a better account of itself than Mr. Max Rissler could have given of himself for the next quarter of an hour. For at least that space of time he was indeed not aware that there was such a person as the said Max Rissler in the world, or even that there was such a place as the world in which to be. His first thought, when consciousness at last returned, was that he was dead, and in heaven, for though dazed in head and aching in body, he was sensible of being lapped in exquisite bliss. And then he opened his eyes to find himself alive and on earth, and yet in heaven, for it was on Joyce Fairfax's bosom that his head was pillowed.

Apparently he had been kicked or trampled by the frightened horse, for Joyce was kneel-

ing on the ground half supporting him with one hand, while with the other she was staunching a cut on his head, from which blood was freely flowing. His happiness was too superb, too supreme, to take wing in thought, so with one exquisite sigh he let his head sink back upon that pillow which was scarcely less soft or less buoyant than the upbearing salt sea billows on which, with outstretched arms, he loved on summer days to lie and float. The ecstasy of that moment he will to his dying hour remember, and all the more so for the fact that—else it had not been ecstasy—it endured but for a moment. Almost as he realized whereon his happy head was lying, he had sunk back into unconsciousness; but recalling that moment afterwards, he has asked himself whether in all our language there is another word, the mere utterance of which is so eloquent of sweet warmth and softest caress, of divinest, dearest consolation and of exquisite Nirvana, as that one word of words —" bosom."

How long he lay thus oblivious of his surroundings he does not know, but, little by little, the drowned, blind, submerged, nearly dead soul of him swam upward and upward, toward light and toward life. And very wonderful was that return to life, for God

takes no less thought in making an ant than in making a universe. With Him it is the scheme not the scale upon which the scheme is carried out that counts. His methods, whether in the peopling of a planet, or in calling back the passing soul of a man, are on the same plane. What happened in Max Rissler's pigmy personality in a few moments' space was but the microscopic mirroring of what has been going on in countless universes these many thousand years. It was an object lesson in evolution. At first there was the inert soulless thing—a very zoophyte of humanity—of which one can say no more than that it barely *lived*. Then, ascending a stage in the scale of being it became vaguely sensitive if not of pleasure at least of pain (alas! to think that pain is the first sensation of which new-comers into this world are conscious!); so that of the creature into which Max Rissler had evolved, one could wax bold to say that it *felt*. Soon the sensitiveness to pain became acuter, for with the possibility of pleasure comes always increased possibility of pain. And now, mounting yet another stage in the scale of being he reached the level of the lower animals, the level of existence without conscious thought. Then he was aware of some such subdued consciousness as we imagine in the brain of a

dozing ox. Thought of a nebulous kind was at work in his brain—not the articulate thought which says "I am I," and asks that "I" whence it came and whither it goes, but a tacit acceptance of the facts of life, a mental meditative chewing of the cud of thought.

Next that consciousness—such as it was—seemed not to change, not to be replaced by consciousness of another sort, but to intensify, as light becomes brighter as it burns. And soon the light in his brain was nebulous no longer. It had focussed into the steady shining human ego. The amœba, the zoophyte, had evolved, had culminated into man, who could say to himself, "I am I," though as yet he did not trouble to ask himself where he was or how he came there.

Exquisite as had been the moment of his lapse into unconsciousness, there was a moment of yet more exquisite ecstasy to come. Though his eyes were closed, he was aware of a darkening which told him that something had come between him and the light. Then, as he lay, some one stooped over him, the neighbourhood of whose presence brought a sudden sense of blossoming flowers, of bird song and indescribable bliss. It was as if one had awakened on a sunny spring or

summer morning to receive direct from God Himself the gift of eternal youth and to find that out of this beautiful world of ours, the sin and sorrow and suffering had for ever passed away, while all that was best and most beautiful eternally remained. Then the some one who had stooped over him stooped yet nearer, and now the flowers exhaled a more exquisite sweetness and blossomed anew in yet rarer beauty, and now it was in the belfry of his brain that the mad and merry music was chiming. As lightly as a feather floats and falls from some bird-breast in mid-air till it rides boatwise upon the surface of stilled waters—so upon his happy lips two warm, soft, sweet-scented lips were laid, and at their touch he thrilled and shuddered in an ecstasy as poignant as pain. Then suddenly they clave and clung to his, in such supreme and passionate abandonment and surrender, that the very soul of him seemed to swoon and to faint from excess of delight. The next moment they were as suddenly withdrawn, and when at last—dazed, spent, almost drunk with happiness, well-nigh delirious with joy—he opened his eyes to look into the dear eyes that matched the dearer lips, the unknown owner of lips and eyes was gone.

He was lying—his head bandaged and his

arm in a sling—in a strange bed in a strange room and was quite alone, though he fancied he heard the voice of some one speaking in an adjoining chamber.

CHAPTER XVII

CONFUSION AND COUSIN CLARA

IN the ordinary way the first questions, one would ask on awaking to find oneself among strange surroundings, and under such conditions, would be: "Where am I?" and "How came I hither?"

It was not so in my case. Such questions, as they presented themselves, I brushed aside as impatiently as one brushes aside the cobweb that darkens the window through which he, once again, has sight of the sun. One question, and one question only, urged for answer: "Whose were the lips that had been pressed to mine?"

To no woman in the world had I ever given cause to suppose that I loved her, and most assuredly, there was no woman in the world who had ever given me cause to suppose she cared for me. That I loved Joyce Fairfax, the reader already knows, and that she had divined my secret, by that intuitive knowledge, which a woman is said to possess, was, I admitted, quite possible; but her attitude toward myself, so far from giving me cause to hope, had always been

one of uncompromising hostility. That it could have been Joyce who had kissed me, was, I told myself, out of the question. I felt, indeed, as if I had acted dishonourably, disloyally, in allowing myself to hope it could have been she, for—even in his inmost thoughts—the person, the mental image, the very name even, of the woman he loves, should be inviolably sacred to the man who remembers that in these days God's chosen title of honour is "gentleman," now that kings see fit to cheapen the once honoured title of "knight." Remembering this, the shamed blood burned in my face, and it was not till I had told myself that I had not thought of Joyce, but for the fact that Joyce was ever in my thoughts, that I felt cooler in face and quieter in conscience.

The next moment the red blood burned in my cheeks again, and for another reason. As I lay there, thinking of Joyce, I suddenly recollected, to the confounding alike of coolness and of conscience, that I had reason, good and sufficient, for supposing that the lips which had been pressed to mine were Joyce Fairfax's and no others: for it was her arm which had encircled me when I had lost consciousness; it was upon her dear bosom that my head had then been pillowed.

"Great Heaven! It was she! it must have been she!" I said aloud.

Then my breath failed me, and for a moment I thought I must suffocate. For the first time in my life, I knew what writers of fiction mean when they speak of an emotion, a joy, a shock, a sorrow, "taking one's breath away."

What I did when my breath came back, the unsympathetic reader, who forgets that I was weak from loss of blood and worn with the strain that had been put upon me, will count womanish and hysterical. I sat bolt upright in bed, snatched off the towel that bandaged the wound on my forehead, and waving it, flag-wise, wildly around my head, shouted at the top of my voice—

"Hip hip hip hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!"

It was the final flicker of my spent strength. The last "hurrah" trailed off into a bleat of silly laughter that was half happiness and half hysteria, and I fell back upon the pillow with a choking in the throat that was suspiciously like a sob.

There was a sound of hurried footsteps—feminine footsteps—upon the stairs.

"Joyce!" I said softly to myself. "Joyce! dear, dear Joyce!" and sat up in bed, my arms half raised, ready to be stretched out

to her. The door opened, and then—alas, for man's gratitude and woman's sisterly solicitousness!—I grunted in a tone of deep and undisguised disgust:

"Oh! it's *you*, is it?"

"Yes, dearest, it's I. Aren't you glad to see me?" said my sister gently. "I am so glad to know you're better. Doctor Eugene Nutcombe hasn't been long gone. He said that you were sleeping comfortably, and he quite expected you'd be almost yourself when you awoke. Is there anything you are wanting? I thought I heard a noise in here just now. Did you call?"

I did not answer at first; for, at the sight of her all my hopes had collapsed. It was she—I might have known it—not Joyce, who had been my nurse and who had stooped to kiss me. Fool! vain, arrogant fool that I had been, ever to have supposed anything else! She, Joyce, the Crown of Womanhood, Queen-Empress of Beauty, stoop to bestow on me, a third-rate little scribbler, an every-day type of the ordinary undistinguished man, the priceless treasure of her love! Oh, but I was well served and justly punished for my presumption!

"Did you call, dear?" repeated my sister. seeing that I made no answer.

"Call!" I snapped viciously—for I was

suffering badly from the effect of reaction; and, manlike, was not above visiting upon the gentle head of one of my women folk (who had done nothing to deserve it) the bitterness and the disappointment which, had she been a stranger whom my displeasure could not have wounded, I should have withheld—"Call! No, I didn't call, I only yelled."

"I'm so, so sorry, dear," she said, the pained tears rising to her eyes. "It was wrong and selfish of me to have gone away. But you were sleeping so soundly that I thought I might slip out for five minutes to get some sal volatile. But I wouldn't have gone for worlds had I thought you were likely to wake."

"Forgive me, dear old girl," I said penitently, remembering the bad headaches from which she suffered, and for which sal volatile was the prescribed remedy. "Is the head bad?"

"It's all right now," she smiled bravely, though I knew by the tired look in her eyes that her headache was almost blinding. "But how are you? And why did you take the bandage off your head?"

"Oh, I'm all right. I took the bandage off because I'm going to get up, and don't want to look more like a sick monkey than

necessary. But first of all, where am I? This room is strange to me."

"You are at Hampton House. Joyce Fairfax brought you here—it was she who came upon the scene just before you met with your accident, you know—and she brought you here because it was so much nearer than our house. Dear girl that she is! You can't think how anxious she's been about you. She blames herself for what happened, and says if she hadn't lost her temper, and struck at the man, the horse wouldn't have taken fright, and you wouldn't have been hurt. Was she really to blame?"

"Not a bit," I said sharply. "If it hadn't been for her, I should have been carted to the police station, and then there'd have been a pretty scandal. By the bye, how has that matter been arranged?"

"Oh, Joyce has seen to that. She packed Sir Henry off to the police station to explain that you were a friend of his, and that the whole thing was a mistake. But this won't do! I have let you talk quite as much as is good for you, but now that you know the facts, you mustn't talk any more. Do you think you could go to sleep?"

"I'll try," I said, for I wanted to think.

So it was Joyce who had brought me here,

and she, according to my sister, had been very anxious about me. Could it be—was it possible—that the lips which had been pressed to mine had been hers after all? I was no authority upon kisses, but those I had received were surely something more than merely sisterly?

So far as I remembered I had never before given two thoughts to the kisses which relatives, elderly or otherwise, sisters, cousins or aunts had bestowed upon (I fear) a somewhat unappreciative recipient.

There had stayed with us, in my school days, a tomboy girl-cousin, called Clara, who had chastely pronounced kissing to be "all rot"; and I remembered that when she was bidden to "kiss her cousins good-night," as was the custom in our family, I had jokingly told her that the particular portion of her fair self which she had offered to me for that purpose, reminded me of a passage in the Scriptures commencing "Incline thine ear to my request." The result had been that it was my own ear, not hers, which had received a chaste salute, administered, not with warm lips, but with an open palm, unpleasantly hardened by what she afterwards described as "cricketing corns."

This cousin I had not seen, until recently, for thirteen years. When I had said good-

bye to her, a schoolgirl of twelve, she had refused to exchange kisses, but when I met her again, a woman of twenty-five and a hospital nurse (the profession of her choice) she had without any affectation of bashfulness, and apparently as a matter of course, offered a plump cheek for a cousinly caress. Remembering the late Mr. William Black's dictum that girls cease to kiss men at ten, and begin again at twenty, I had accepted the pretty boon as my cousinly perquisite and prerogative, and perhaps as part payment for the cab fare which it had just been my privilege to settle. Neither that cousinly salute, nor the cordial hug and sisterly kiss (I had almost said sisterly smack) with which Mrs. Cottingdean always greeted her brother, could for a moment be compared to the passionate clinging love-caress which had drawn my very soul—quivering like thin flame—to my lips. And were the lips, that had played that sweet love-lyric and love-duet upon mine, not Joyce Fairfax's, then had that kiss been a profanation of love's shrine. As I lay there, I vowed to myself that were those lips not Joyce Fairfax's, then would I never be kissed by woman more. Whose then were they? Upon that question hung all my happiness—to that question I must discover the answer, and without delay.

"Are you there, old girl?" I asked, not knowing whether my sister were still in the room.

She was by the bedside in an instant.

"Yes, I'm here, dear. Still awake? I had hoped you had gone to sleep. What can I do for you? Are the pillows comfortable?"

"Oh, yes, they are all right," I added. "But tell me. How long have I been here? And has any one been in the room beside yourself? Are you my only nurse?"

"You have been here three days, and Helen Hampton has been to see how you were getting on, and Sir Henry, and Dr. Nutcombe, of course. And in the matter of nurses, you have been very well off. By the merest good luck, Cousin Clara, happening not to have any urgent nursing cases, and wanting a few days' holiday, ran down to see me the very day after you met with your accident. The moment she heard of what had happened, she insisted on installing herself as chief of the sick-room; and, nursing being her profession, I gave way to her as better qualified and better able to nurse you than I, though of course I would rather have looked after you all myself. She has gone to get half an hour in the fresh air now, and that's why I'm on duty instead of her."

Cousin Clara! the tomboy schoolgirl of the inclined ear! the fair profferer of a cousinly cheek! Here was a new complication! Oh, this was too awful!

I have known men—we all have—who imagined that every woman at whom they looked was in love with them, and I have itched—we all have—so to spoil what they fancied was their gift of beauty, as to put outside the bounds of possibility their ever again imagining anything of the sort. Yet here was I, a man, who though he had too often played the boaster, as well as the craven, had at least never in his life been guilty of such vanity and vapourings towards the other sex, as even to suppose that any particular woman had as much as given two thoughts to him—here was I confronted by the dreadful necessity of deciding which of two women it was who had kissed me. I say "two," for in such matters a sister does not count, nor, for the matter of that, should a cousin. That it was not my sister I was already persuaded. Yet if it was not my sister, who could it be but my cousin, since these two had been my nurses? But Cousin Clara! Why the thing was preposterous. Cousin Clara cared rather less for me than she cared for her favourite cat, and as far as my feelings towards her were concerned I in-

finitely preferred the cat. Then what the deuce did Cousin Clara mean by coming fussing round where she wasn't wanted, and so making more complicated an already confused and complicated situation!

"Confound Cousin Clara!" I said aloud, able no longer to contain myself.

"Max!" said the startled and reproachful voice of my sister. "My dear Max! What can you mean? I always thought you liked Cousin Clara. I am sure she always liked you. It's most ungrateful to talk in that way. Cousin Clara has been most kind. I assure you if it hadn't been for Cousin Clara——"

"Oh, hang Cousin Clara!" I exclaimed in exasperation, relapsing under the bedclothes where I lay brooding over my wrongs.

After a few minutes of pained and strained silence, I put my head out from between the blankets like an emboldened tortoise showing himself from under the shell into which he has shrunk.

"What a brute I am to talk like that in your presence! Forgive me, old girl. It's too bad of me. I'm a little out of sorts, and that makes me irritable, you know. But one can have too much even of Cousin Clara, and by the way you speak of her, the confounded woman seems to pervade the

place. But, tell me, hasn't any one else taken a hand at nursing except you and Cousin Clara!"

"Oh yes. I was going to tell you if you hadn't taken me up so roughly. Helen sat up part of the first night, and Joyce Fairfax took her turn in the morning before Cousin Clara arrived."

CHAPTER XVIII

MAX RISSLER, KISS INVESTIGATOR

JOYCE! Joyce had taken her turn at nursing! Joyce was in the house—had sat by me, stooped over, perhaps . . . kissed me! And in this very room! And, by the bye, what a pretty room it was. So airy, so spacious! Why hadn't I noticed it before! I had never seen a room so admirably constructed. I liked specially that windowed built-out recess under the arch! just the place for the dressing-table, in the glass of which, no doubt, the wonderful face of Joyce Fairfax had been reflected. If I ever married—which was not likely—but if ever I did, and built a house for myself, there should be just such another room as this in it. It was such a light room. It was not so much part of the house as a built-in bit of the garden, a sheltered space stolen from the open. A friend of mine in Cornwall had built a tiny house at the extreme edge of a strip of rock that ran out into the sea, and with casements opening directly upon the Atlantic. Staying with him there, the sea rather than the

land seemed my native element. And so with this room. That windowed recess running out into the garden seemed to bring the garden within doors. The trees looked in through the panes like friendly faces. And see! A spray of jessamine had slipped through that unclosed window and swayed, lightly-poised, toward me like a hand stretched forth to invite me out of doors. And what a morning! No wonder the birds were singing more blithely than I had ever heard birds sing before, for it is only once or twice in a life-time that the sun shines like this in England. Listen to that note! Why it was "Joyce, Joyce, Joyce, Sweet Joyce, pretty Joyce, dear Joyce. Sweet, Sweet, Sweet!" that the thrush was singing.

All this, long as it takes to write, had gone through my mind while my sister was speaking.

"Yes," she went on; "and though there's no denying that Joyce has been unaccountably rude to you in the past, I must say for her that no one could have been kinder, or more anxious for your comfort, than she has been since she brought you here after your smash. She did seem so sorry for you! What are you laughing at, dear?"

I was laughing for sheer happiness at the hope her words had brought to me, though I could not give this reason to my sister.

The next moment however my new-born hope which was mounting like warmed quicksilver in a thermometer, received a sudden check.

"I was speaking to Cousin Clara about it," my sister continued, "and Cousin Clara, who doesn't like Joyce—she thinks she's heartless—says that Joyce is only kind to you because she's ashamed of being so rude to you before, and of being the means of getting you hurt. Cousin Clara was quite angry when I told her just *how* rude Joyce had been, and in fact Cousin Clara thinks——"

Then I broke out.

"Do you suppose you could manage to keep Cousin Clara—confound her!—out of the question for twenty consecutive seconds?" I said with exasperation. "Anybody would think I was cursed with a score of Cousin Claras, instead, thank Heaven! of only one. She goes in and out of your conversation like the stage super who comes in at one door, crosses in front, goes out of the other, and then runs round the back to come on and cross again, and then again, to make the audience believe he's a mob. And what the dickens does Cousin Clara mean by expressing opinions about my affairs!—though it's your fault more than hers for talking to her about my affairs at all."

"I'm very sorry, Max dear," quavered the little woman, now on the brink of tears; "though I don't think you need take me up so snappishly. After all, Cousin Clara *is* your cousin."

"Exactly. That's just what I complain of. Anybody would think, to hear you talk, that she was my wife and mother, and sister and aunt. But don't let you and me quarrel about her, my dear, or about anything else, for the matter of that. I know I'm a brute, but give me a kiss, like the dear little woman you are, and we'll forget all about it."

"Dear old man!" she said, stooping so forgivingly to accord the caress that I, who had asked for it chiefly, I must confess, for purposes of comparison, felt—except for the fact that I was the receiver instead of the giver—very much like a second Iscariot.

"That's right. We're friends again, aren't we?" I said cheerfully. "Now run away and lie down and see if you can't get rid of that horrid headache. Oh no! it won't matter a bit about your leaving me. But if you'd like to send Cousin Clara to take your place, you can. I'll be quite nice to her, if only for your sake, and after all, as you say, she has been very kind."

"Max Rissler! my boy," I remarked to

myself when my sister had gone, "you have been accustomed to regard your ways as above-board and without guile; and yourself—to quote your favourite Sir Henry Wotton—as one

> 'Whose armour is his honest thought,
> And simple truth his utmost skill.'

"But it strikes me, my friend, that if this sort of thing is to happen often, you'll soon be well on your way to become a monster of duplicity. Here you have already cozened an unsuspecting sister out of a kiss, in order that you may compare it with a sample recently received from another lady, and now you propose cozening a cousin out of a like salute, so that you may satisfy yourself that it wasn't she who kissed you on a former occasion. And don't you talk to me, sir, about a detective having to do all sorts of things that he doesn't want to! Max Rissler, Crime Investigator, is all very well, as far as it goes, but Max Rissler, Kiss Investigator, is quite another story. How would that read in *Who's Who*, my boy? I wonder in which section of your biography the editor of the publication in question would record this latest accomplishment?—among the 'published works'? or among the 'favourite recreations'? Perhaps he would contend

that a kiss is, in a sense, the publication of a love-story, even if only for private circulation—and would place it in the first-named section. It would look better there than in the other. Fancy one's 'favourite recreation' being given as 'cricket, cycling, kissing!' Oh! that would never do. Rather than that I'd draw up an advertisement to the other effect: 'Mr. Max Rissler, Kiss Expert and Crime Investigator, presents his compliments to his numerous patrons and solicits the favour of——' oh! what wretched rot I'm talking! That knock on the head has brought on softening of the brain surely, or let's say that the loss of blood has left me light-headed. If ever I make a book of my search after that arch-abductor, Norman, I hope that the reader will not be so ungenerous as to take the chapter in which I shall describe what has happened since my smash, as a specimen of either my sentiment or my honour. When I come to write down in cold blood all the sickly sugar-stick stuff about kisses, and to put upon paper the puerile puns and unspeakable sillinesses of which I have been guilty—when I come to this, I shall, I fear, be minded to leave this particular part of my story untold. But here comes the fair Cousin Clara. The first handicap for the kissing cup race

resulted in the defeat of Sister Cicely. Now for the final heat. There are only two starters—Hospital Nurse and Lady Looking-Glass. If the first named filly drops out——Oh, how do you do, Cousin Clara? How good of you to come to look after this broken-headed cripple. According to Cicely, I should never have got well at all except for you. It has been 'Cousin Clara did this,' and 'Cousin Clara said that,' until I have got heartily sick of hearing Cousin Clara's virtues eulogized. What's this for?"

The "this" was Cousin Clara's plump and rather pretty hand which she was holding out to me in friendly greeting.

"I've seen it before, thank you—felt it as well as seen it," I said. "Do you remember Christina Rossetti's poem, beginning, 'My heart is like a singing bird'? My poor ear was uncommonly like a singing bird for a good five minutes after it first had the pleasure of making that fair hand's acquaintance. That's a long time ago, Clara, but this right ear of mine burns now as I think of the sounding smack you dealt me. You had cricketing corns on your hands in those days, I remember; and you made a very cricket of my poor ear in the matter of singing. No, I decline flatly to shake hands. To do so would establish a precedent which

I do not desire to establish. The last time I had the happiness of seeing my Cousin Clara she very graciously permitted me the privilege of a cousinly kiss. Why should she be less kind on this occasion? I think I deserve more, instead of less consideration and cossetting, now that I'm a broken-headed cripple, and I refuse flatly to be put off with a mere handshake."

"Oh, indeed," she said. "When I saw you last, sir, we hadn't met since we had been children, and the occasion warranted something a little more demonstrative between relatives than can be permitted at ordinary times. However, if you'll be very good, and go to sleep after you've had some beef tea ——" she stooped over me, and let her lips rest for an instant upon mine.

* * * * *

I am told that to this day Cousin Clara—now grown unromantically stout of figure and short of breath—is wont to shake her head whenever my name is mentioned, and to deplore complacently the stern necessity which compelled her to "spoil" my "life." "Poor Max," she said the last time I brought out a book. "Yes, it is true, he does work hard; you see, he must seek distraction in something and I'm glad it's only writing instead of whisky or—wickedness, as has

happened with some men in similar circumstances. But it's cold comfort writing books when the heart is breaking. I couldn't help it that I never thought of him as more than a cousin, while he worshipped the ground I walked on. My marriage was his death blow. I'd like to have asked him to stand godfather to one of the twins, but I was afraid it would only reopen the old wound. Some women seem born to spoil men's lives. Poor fellow, it's very sad. I remember that time when he begged me, implored me, for pity's sake—just for once in his life — to kiss him. It was when that designing creature (I hate red-headed women), Joyce Fairfax was staying at Lady Hampton's. Max, who was half off his head at the time for love of me, and really was so distracted in mind that he didn't know what he was doing, had got smashed up in an accident, and would not hear of any one nursing him but me. I believe his sister, Cicely Cottingdean, thought that he got hurt on purpose, so as to make an excuse to have me near him. I had always known he was madly in love with me, but I should have known it when I kissed him (only just a cousinly kiss to humour him you know), even if I hadn't known it before. You never saw a man's face light up so. Just for the

moment his happiness turned his head, for I remember he shouted out excitedly, 'Lady Looking-Glass wins! Lady Looking-Glass wins!'

"What he meant by 'Lady Looking-Glass wins' I haven't the slightest idea, unless the poor fellow was becoming light-headed at my taking pity upon him. But evidently his happiness was too much for him, for the next moment he turned deadly white and fell back upon the pillow, looking for all the world as if he'd had a shock."

* * * * *

That was Cousin Clara's account (as afterwards related to me by a friend) of what took place on the memorable day of which I am writing.

Her facts, if not her deductions, are in the main correct. I *did* shout, "Lady Looking-Glass wins! Lady Looking-Glass wins!" for the instant Clara's lips touched mine, I knew that they were not those of the woman who had stooped to kiss me, when consciousness was returning. And I did, as she said, fall back suddenly upon the pillow, feeling, if not looking, as if—as she put it—I had had "a shock," for, standing in the doorway, looking at the pair of us with eyes of supercilious scorn, was no less a person than the Lady of the Looking-Glass herself.

CHAPTER XIX

LET COUSINLY LOVE CONTINUE

"HERE'S a pretty kettle of fish!" I said as Joyce turned her back upon us and, unseen by Clara, left the room. "She'll assume now that the relationship between Clara and myself is more than cousinly, and to one of her temperament that fact will, in itself, stand in the way of her entertaining, much less of her inclining a favourable ear to my suit. She is too proud a woman to accept a second-hand love from any man, and now that she has cause to believe some sort of understanding exists between Clara and myself, my chances of success, remote enough as they have been in the past, are practically non-existent."

My gloomy anticipations did not remain long unjustified, for though Joyce accompanied Lady Hampton when that kindest of hostesses came, later on in the day, to inquire how the patient was progressing, the attitude of the Lady of the Looking-Glass to myself was far from encouraging. It

wasn't that she was angry. If she had been so I should not have felt altogether without hope, for it often happens that, to a woman in anger, there succeeds a moment of reaction, when her will weakens. The tide of her anger does not stay long at the flood, and, when once that tide has turned, it will sometimes carry the boat of him, who bides his time and steers warily, farther in the direction he wishes to go than it had previously carried him out of his way.

Unfortunately Joyce was not angry. She simply cut the pair of us—Clara and me—as completely out of her life, as the conditions under which we were all thrown together would permit. To neither of us did she, of her own accord, ever make a remark, and if either of us took the initiative, and addressed her, she replied with a courtesy so forced and so studied as to savour less of courtesy than of contempt. If ever she did appear to recognize our existence, it was (and this to me was most galling of all) to assume that Clara and I were engaged lovers who were desirous of being left alone to bill and to coo.

Moreover a new horror was added to life, a new complication to the already complicated situation, by the fact that my egregious and incorrigible cousin insisted upon treating me,

in public and in private, as if she were the unwon but not unkind mistress of my heart, and I her captive and love-sick swain.

On the afternoon of the day following that upon which I had recovered consciousness, I was so much better that Lady Hampton very kindly proposed to have tea served in my room, that the time should seem less long to me. The first remark which Cousin Clara made on entering, in company with our hostess, my sister, and Miss Fairfax was—

"We've all come to have tea with you, Max; dear, and if you're a very good boy, and promise to behave yourself, I'll take the chair nearest to you."

The way in which the words were spoken seemed so to imply an understanding between the speaker and the person addressed, that Lady Hampton and my sister stared first at Clara and me, and then meaningly at each other.

Joyce said nothing, but the little lift that she gave to her shapely chin was to me, at least, eloquent of scorn.

"Thank you, but I don't fancy being crowded," I replied so nastily that the others stared again.

"Poor boy! he shan't be crowded," said Clara coquettishly. "Do you know, dear Lady Hampton, I *was* afraid it would be a

little too much for him to have four visitors all at once, so I think, as I'm the nurse in charge, it would be best if I turned you all out. Perhaps to-morrow he'll be strong enough to see visitors, but for to-day at all events it will excite him less if his nurse and he have their tea all by themselves."

The impudence of the woman, in putting upon my words an interpretation so entirely foreign to my meaning, took my breath away, and before I could splutter out an explanation, the other three—bridling with indignation at what they no doubt thought my discourteous reception—were being hustled out of the room.

"Stop! stop!" I exclaimed savagely. "I didn't mean——"

"Yes, yes dear. That's all right. Miss Fairfax and Lady Hampton quite understand. They don't think you rude, dear, for wanting to get rid of them. It's quite natural you shouldn't want to have too many visitors to-day. You and I will have a nice little tea all to ourselves."

I turned over in the bed and groaned impotently. Nothing short of strangling Cousin Clara on the spot would have given adequate relief to my feelings, for Joyce, Lady Hampton and my sister had all left the room believing that my complaint about

being "crowded" had been directed against them, and that my exhibition of "temper" was due to the fact that I had hoped to have had the company of that sweet charmer, Cousin Clara, all to myself.

So this was what came of diplomacy! No more diplomacy for me. If I had point-blank asked all the womenfolk of the household—Joyce included—whether they had or had not played Dian to my Endymion by kissing me while I lay asleep, I could not have made so deplorable a mess of things as I had made by attempting to arrive at the facts by more diplomatic and less direct means.

"Hang it all!" I said to myself, "I *will* ask them—at least I'll ask Joyce Fairfax, at all events. The rest don't matter. The situation can't be more strained than it is, even if Joyce takes offence, as she very well may, at any man, whether she cares for him or not, being guilty of such an outrage upon good taste—not to say upon decency—as to put such a question to her at all. By putting the question however, I shall at least have an opportunity of explaining the facts in regard to Cousin Clara, for lie under the imputation of being fascinated by that simpering, grinning hippopotamus-hided idiot I can't and won't."

First of all, however, I had to make my peace with Lady Hampton. Her one thought

in proposing that tea should be served in my room was to keep me from moping or from feeling lonely. How had she been rewarded? By being given to understand, in her own house, that I very much preferred her room to her company, with the added humiliation that a like insult had been offered, in their hostess's presence, to two of her guests.

Lie another instant under the imputation of having behaved in so intolerable a manner I could not.

"Clara," I said, "will you kindly present my compliments to Lady Hampton, and say that I should be infinitely obliged to her if she would allow me to trouble her so far as to ask her to spare me five minutes of her time. And as I can better say what I have to say in a private conversation than if you are in the room, perhaps you would be so good as to leave us to ourselves?"

Clara was not a sensitive person, and rather prided herself upon the openness with which she gave expression to her views.

"Well I never!" she exclaimed, putting down the kettle, the better to stare at me, and not noticing, in her agitation, that she had placed it, not upon the metal stand, but upon a plate of thin bread and butter. Then snatching at the kettle again, she lifted it above her head, and gazing foolishly at a

slice of buttered bread that was adhering to the bottom, she said—

"It's all your fault that I did that. What can you have to say to Lady Hampton that I mustn't hear I should like to know? No, I shan't send for her. I'm the nurse in charge here, and I'm not going to have you exciting yourself or over-talking yourself. If you tell me what it is you want to speak to Lady Hampton about, I'll see her for you, and tell her if you like. It can't be anything that it would matter for me to know. I'm your cousin, am I not?"

I pleaded guilty to the last indictment, and sighed deeply, recalling the account of a railway accident which had taken place a few days before in a distant part of the world. The newspapers were full of sympathy for one of the passengers who, unhurt himself, had lost thirteen relatives—an uncle, an aunt, and eleven cousins—by the disaster. I lay myself, open, I know, to the charge of heartlessness and of bad taste, even in seeming to speak flippantly of anything connected with loss of life or human suffering. But as I looked upon the foolish face and listened to the vulgar voice of the only cousin of mine whom I knew personally, and wondered whether the numerous cousins whom I did *not* know resembled her in any way—I could

not help asking myself whether the lot of the man who had lost eleven cousins, at one fell stroke, was altogether without its alleviations, and whether it were not possible that the amount of sympathy which had been lavished upon him in the newspapers had been altogether necessary.

Argue with Cousin Clara I could not, so, as there was an electric bell by the side of the bed, I stretched out a hand and pressed my finger upon the button.

"Please ask Mrs. Cottingdean to come to me," I said to the servant who answered the summons.

When my sister arrived and inquired, somewhat stiffly, what she could do for me, I turned to Cousin Clara, whose intention to sit out the new-comer was very evident.

"I know you're dying to get away from this room for a while Clara," I said, "and it would be a shame to keep you bottled up longer than necessary. Do run away and get some air—at least for as long as Cicely's here."

She somewhat sulkily and suspiciously withdrew, and then I opened fire by explaining to my sister that in hustling my three visitors out of the room under the pretence that I had complained about being "crowded," Clara had chosen to put an entirely false interpretation upon my words.

"Don't you bother about that, old man," said Cicely. "I'll make the necessary explanation to Helen and to Joyce. I knew there was a mistake somewhere; though it's a fact that you have been so irritable since that accident of yours, that there's no knowing whom you are going to take up next. But isn't there something else worrying you? I know you and your ways tolerably well by now, and it seems to me there's something else you are not easy about."

There was, for remembering that it was among a list of Norman's victims, actual or intended, that I had first seen the name of Joyce Fairfax; and remembering also how recently the abductor had been in St. Albans, whither he had no doubt come to arrange for the carrying out of his villainous intentions towards her—remembering all this, I say, I realized how imperative it was that Miss Fairfax should at once be warned of the danger in which she stood.

To tell my sister the story of my meeting with Norman and of my determination to track the abductor down, I was by no means inclined. "Never take the court into your confidence until the case is complete" has been my invariable rule, in the conduct of my investigations. More often than not it is a mistake to let the lay-mind into the secrets of one's

craft. The finished picture shall win for you the applause and the appreciation of the layman, but take him to your studio and let him see the same picture in its incomplete, preliminary stage and to him it shall remain a crude production. He can never forget his first impression. "So that's the way it is done, is it?" says he. "That wonderful, worship-compelling woman-face that seems to have sprung into being at God's whispered word is but a matter of mosaic after all. The model was here last night—you saw her, an actress's understudy with painted cheeks and darkened eyes. The oval of the face is hers, and the hair, but the Irish flower-seller at the street corner owns the original of that sweet mouth, and—would you believe it?—'twas the artist's own scullery-maid who sat for the eyes."

Or let us suppose you to be a sonnet-maker, and that you show him your unfinished lines. "Ho! ho!" says he. "This poem, that seems as perfect and spontaneous as the dew-drop on the lily, the tear on the cheek, the star in the sky, was pieced together like a picture-puzzle—here an adjective and there a verb—by a niggling little word-juggler who sat and nibbled an uneasy pen meanwhile."

For him henceforth picture, poem or statue

has but small appeal. He has been let, as he thinks, into the trick of the trade, and the odds are that he hold both the art and the artist in some measure of contempt.

It was not my intention, when speaking of "taking the court into one's confidence before one's case is complete," to compare my own clumsy methods of tracing a crime to the consummate artistry of the painter, the sculptor or the poet. But it is fact that the one rule holds good for all, and tell my sister the story of my dealings with Norman, ere yet I had brought those dealings to a conclusion, I was by no means minded. Those dealings, and the danger in which Joyce stood, I would make known, only to Joyce herself, though it was my sister to whom I must look to obtain for me a hearing. That hearing I decided to obtain by making known to my sister my feelings towards Joyce.

"Yes," I said in reply to her question whether there was not something else about which I wished to speak. "Yes, there is. I want your help in a matter that very nearly concerns my happiness. It's to do with Joyce Fairfax, whom I have loved from the moment I first set eyes on her."

"'Also Her Majesty Queen Anne is dead!' (Do you remember the quotation from your

favourite Austin Dobson, sir ?)" she mocked. "Why, my dear boy, I knew you were over head and ears in love with Joyce from the very first. But what I want to know is: when *was* that first ? There's always been a mystery to me about you and her. I admit to being a match-maker, and it had occurred to me, before you came to St. Albans that she'd make an ideal Mrs. Max, and would moreover be a sister-in-law to do one credit—which one can't say of all sisters-in-law. Then you turned up unexpectedly, and almost the first question you ask is: 'Do you know Miss Joyce Fairfax ?' That in itself was enough to set any woman's curiosity on edge, not to speak of a fond sister's. Then when I ask you what you know of Joyce, you most aggravatingly reply, 'Nothing except the name,' and when I inquire where you heard her name, you mysteriously say you saw it in a letter, but don't even know whom the letter was from. Then you and she meet—presumably for the first time,—and although she had often told me she would like very much to know you, and had asked me all sorts of questions about you, she treats you, when you are introduced, with insufferable insolence. Tell me, was that or was that not the first occasion on which you two had met ? I have always had my suspicions on that point."

The incident of the looking-glass I very naturally wished to suppress, for even with a sister I could not stoop to discuss the action of the woman I loved.

"I had never set eyes on Miss Fairfax," I replied evasively, "until the day you took me to call upon Lady Hampton."

"Very well. That settles it," she said briefly. "And I am wrong in supposing there had been anything between you and Joyce before then. Well, tell me more. How fares your wooing?"

"It doesn't fare," I said ruefully. "It doesn't get a chance to fare, for she avoids me systematically."

"That needn't discourage you unduly," laughed Cicely. "It's quite clear that she thinks about you—kindly or unkindly—or she wouldn't systematically avoid you. The mischief of it is when a woman *doesn't* think. Have you ever given her cause to suppose you care for her?"

"Well, no, I can't say I have. How could I when she never gives me a chance of speaking?"

"Oh, nonsense; you must make your chance, and it strikes me that you'll never get a better chance than now. When a man's been smashed up as you've been, he's got a much stronger claim on a woman's

consideration than when he's swaggering around with an indecently healthy appetite for chops and steaks, and looking offensively robust. I'll send Joyce to you now. I'll tell her that you're awfully upset about Clara's making you out as if you meant to be rude to Helen and herself. She'll say that it doesn't matter, and she quite understands, and that you needn't say any more about it, and all the rest. And then I'll hint darkly at brain fever—say that the doctor has told me you must be humoured, and that I'm quite sure you wouldn't go to sleep until you have got your apology off your mind. She'll come then, for she's a real good sort, in spite of her rudeness to yourself. Then when you are fully assured of your forgiveness, you must drop the rôle of penitent, and see what headway you can make in the rôle of lover. But first let me rumple up your hair a bit, old man. It's only a handsome man (and I'm not going to flatter you by pretending you're that, though you suit me very well as you are), with cut features and a classical profile, who can afford to brush his hair as immaculately and as abominably as yours is brushed now. It makes you look quite sinister. And, for heaven's sake, try and look a little less doleful. It's only silly schoolgirls who fall in love with Knights of the Woeful Countenance.

We women like our menfolk to look masterful—as if they were ready to face and fight that big bully, the World—not to be frightened by him. That's better, but try to smile a little (any one would think you were having your portrait taken, and that I was the photographer). That's better still. Now you look more like the boy who used to come to me to get him out of the scrapes he'd managed to get into. Well, good-bye, old man. I know I've talked a lot of nonsense, but it was only because I wanted to see you look more like yourself—and you do now. Don't forget your old sister when you've won the pretty wife you're pining for. Here's one kiss on the end of your nose so as not to ruffle that moustache you are so mightily proud of, and that you've been twisting together so carefully. Do you remember those theatricals we had at home that Christmas Eve so long ago? You played Sir Somebody Something and wore a pair of whiskers that Arthur Tremayne had saved up all his pocket money to buy. He used to put them on when it was dark, and walk down the village in the hope that people would take him for a man. He was tremendously proud of those whiskers, I remember, and wanted a lot of pressing before he'd consent to lend them to you for the theatricals. And he was sorry he had

let you have them when the evening came, for you fancied yourself so in whiskers that you couldn't let them alone for two consecutive seconds, but twirled and twisted and tugged at them just as a heavy cavalryman tugs at a big moustache. Do you remember making your great speech before being taken out to be shot as a spy? You hurled magnificent scorn at your accusers, 'Miscreants one and all, I defy you! I am an officer and a gentleman, and no spy; and the England that I love and serve will avenge my blood, and in centuries to come will be proud to remember how fearlessly a son and soldier of Britain went out to die!' were, I think, your words.

"You made quite a hit in that speech, and emphasized it splendidly by throwing all your scorn (and there was plenty of it) into one magnificently defiant tug and twirl at the whiskers.

"I know you did it well, for the 'house' was quite still for a moment, just as it is in real theatres before the storm of thunderous and spontaneous applause. And just at that psychological moment in the play there came a distressed voice from the wings—

"'I say, old man; for Heaven's sake steady on with my whiskers. They cost me seven and six, and are not meant for that sort of

thing. You're pulling at 'em just as if they were a door-bell!'

"It spoilt all the effect of your fine acting, but oh! how we all laughed.

"There, I have been talking worse nonsense than ever, but anyhow it has made you a little less like a man who is waiting to have a tooth out. I am off, really, this time, and to fetch Joyce. Good-bye, dear old fellow; good luck to your wooing."

The door closed behind her, and five minutes afterwards there was a knock.

"Come in!" I said valorously, and it opened to admit Joyce.

CHAPTER XX

IN WHICH MY WORST FEARS ARE REALIZED

THE little sister had done wonders, for Miss Fairfax's greeting was almost gracious. And I—thanks to the little sister who had talked me (nonsense though her chatter may have been) out of my self-consciousness—acquitted myself almost creditably. I made quite a pretty speech of apology for venturing to trouble Miss Fairfax to come to me ; expressed my gratitude for her goodness in humouring a sick man's wishes ; and told her how mistaken Cousin Clara had been in imagining that I was not glad and grateful to have the company at tea of three such visitors as Lady Hampton, Mrs. Cottingdean and Miss Fairfax.

Joyce, I must say, accepted both the explanation and the apology handsomely. Then I said that there was another matter, nearly concerning herself, upon which it was absolutely imperative that I should speak. I told her of Norman's visit and of the offer

he had been commissioned to make to me, of my refusal of that offer, and of my determination to hunt down the arch-abductor and his principals.

She listened without a word, though I knew by the catching of her breath, the stormy rising and falling of her bosom, and by the whiteness of her face, that she was deeply moved, and when I told her that it was upon Norman's list that I had first seen the name of Joyce Fairfax, and that it was in consequence of my having seen that name upon his list, that I had come to St. Albans, she swayed in her chair as if about to faint.

By a supreme effort of will she became mistress of herself again and listened, I thought, mechanically, and as if her thoughts were elsewhere, while I described how I had seen Norman pass the post office in a motor car, and had at once given chase. I told her of the borrowed bicycle, bringing the narrative up to the moment when she had come upon the scene. Then, emboldened by her silence, I ventured to speak of the kiss which some one had pressed upon my lips, and blurted out—clumsily enough I fear—my hope that the somebody had been she. "Miss Fairfax! Joyce!" I stammered, catching at her hand, "won't you tell me? Was it you? Only the one word, 'yes' or 'no.'"

She snatched away her hand, and for a moment I thought she was about to strike me.

"You coward! You cad! You bully!" she said, and in the next moment had left the room.

Had any man used such words to me, he would have been made to answer for them while yet they bore the mould of his lips —while yet the breath in which they were uttered was warm on the air. Had any woman in all the world, except Joyce Fairfax, so addressed me, that woman's very name— be she who she might—I should have cut for ever out of my memory. But of Joyce Fairfax I could not and would not believe evil. That I deserved so to be insulted I could not see. I was ready to admit that I had acted in bad taste in daring to ask—and to her face —a sensitive and delicately minded gentlewoman, such a question as I had unfortunately put to Joyce; but a man may act in bad taste, and be guilty of presumption, even of unpardonable presumption, and yet not deserve such affront as had been put upon me. But that Joyce was to blame I would not, even to myself, admit. Faith, absolute and unwavering, in the loved one, is the first article in Love's creed. What reason Joyce had for thinking of me as she unhappily did, I could

not imagine, but the mere fact that she so thought was evidence sufficient that she had good reason—or what she believed to be good reason—for so thinking. Some one had made it his or her business to slander me, and who that some one was it must be my business to find out. I am, as the reader knows, fond of mysteries, and here was mystery ready to hand that called urgently to be solved.

Days passed and I saw or heard nothing of Joyce, nor did she even trouble to send to inquire for me. This, in view of her open declaration of hostilities, was no matter for wonder; but what I could not understand was that neither from my sister nor from Lady Hampton could I get one word about her. When I asked how she was, they looked mysterious, troubled, unhappy, but replied that she was quite well. My sister had returned to my room soon after my interview with Joyce, but gathering apparently from my dejection that things had not gone well, she thoughtfully forebore to question me—for which exhibition of womanly tact I was profoundly grateful.

On the fifth day after my accident I was so much better in bodily health that Dr. Nutcombe said he thought I might get up. My sister, who brought me news of the doctor's decision seemed, I could see, ill at ease, and

fidgeted first with one of the objects in the room, and then with another, as is the way with those who have an unpleasant duty to perform. At last I could stand it no longer.

"Cicely," I said, "you have something to tell me. What is it?"

"Yes, dear," said she. "There was a letter came for you, addressed to my care, the day after your smash. I hope it's nothing important."

It was a typed communication from Norman, posted in London on the evening after he and I had journeyed together in the run-away motor car. Here is an exact copy of it—

"He who drives fat oxen should himself be fat. He who tries to convey a prisoner to the police station in a motor car should know a little about motoring. The narrow squeak we had of running into the wall near the *Cricketers' Inn* was an accident, and was due to my carelessness. But the pretended running away of the car down Holywell Hill, and the supposed jamming of the steering wheel, were bounce and bunkum for the undoing of yourself, you baby and booby, who fancy yourself a detective. And even if it had come to a question of letting the car run away in earnest, I'd sooner, any day, get smashed up in a motor, in company with that

interfering fool and particular enemy of mine, Master Max Rissler, than get lodged by myself in St. Albans Jail.

"You called me a coward and jackal once. You're a mighty tall talker when it's a question of putting up one's fists for a box, of which I know nothing. But I know something about motoring, and which of us was it played coward and fool and jackal yesterday? which of us turned tail on his own prisoner, and scuttled off at the back of the car to save his own dirty neck. Bah! you make me sick, you coward. Go back to your novel-scribbling and leave men's work to men, and don't pit your puny brain against one who can crush you as easily as he could crush a spider, and who *will* crush you if you cross his path again.

"THE JACKAL."

Here was a pretty letter for a would-be detective to receive, and from the very criminal whom he was making it his business to bring to justice! And the worst of it was that every word Norman said was true. I had first let him fool me to the top of my bent, and then had let my own want of nerve betray me into acting like a craven. The only crumb of comfort which remained to me was the knowledge that I was at the moment hardly

responsible for my action. At any other time the ride on the runaway motor, which, in the weakened state of my body and the excited state of my mind, had seemed such a desperate bit of business, would have assumed very different proportions, and might have had a very different termination.

"There is nothing in this letter of any consequence, my dear," I said to Cicely, replacing the document in the envelope. "If you'll kindly give me the pocket book which you'll find in the breast pocket of my coat there, I'd be glad, as I may want the letter again as evidence in a case I'm getting up. Thank you; please put the pocket book back again. Thanks once more. Was this letter the only thing you were bothering that little head of yours about? It is of very little consequence, I assure you. I let a man make a fool of me the other day, and he's had the politeness to write and tell me I'm a fool, that's all. It doesn't make me any less of a fool, or him any less a rogue, but no matter. Sure that's all you're worrying about? That little frown between your eyes is still there. What is it, old woman? I'm sure there's something else."

"Yes, dear," she said almost tearfully. "There is. It's about Joyce."

"Joyce!" I said sharply. "Joyce! She's

left the house. Is that what you mean? She declines to continue under the roof that shelters my despised self; that's it, isn't it?"

"Yes, dear," she replied very softly, "you're partly right. Joyce has left the house."

"Partly right?" I said bitterly. "I'm entirely right. She's left because of me, I know it."

"No, dear old man. It wasn't because of you. We all wish it were. Then it would be less serious. But it's worse than that. I wouldn't let Helen tell you before, for fear of making you ill again, but oh, Max darling!" —here the little sister broke down entirely and burst into a very storm of sobs and tears— "Joyce, poor Joyce, has disappeared. She went out for a walk the morning after her talk with you, leaving word that she should be back before lunch, and has never been seen or heard of since. Helen and Sir Henry are distracted. They telegraphed to Scotland Yard asking that the best detectives on the staff should be sent down. The town has been searched, the neighbourhood has been scoured, but Joyce has vanished completely off the face of the earth, and search as they will, the police and the detectives have failed to find one single thread of evidence to show what's become of her. And oh! Max

dear, I'm afraid—the police say there can be no doubt about it—our poor Joyce is the latest victim of that infamous gang which has already abducted so many women!"

CHAPTER XXI

THE SHADOWING OF A SHADOWER

SO Norman had taken advantage of the fact that I was laid by the heels, to carry out his infamous purpose in regard to Miss Fairfax! Very well. Norman it must now be my business to find, and, when next he and I met, there would be so long an account to settle that one of us would be like to receipt the bill with his life. In saying this I do not mean to imply that it was my deliberate intention to kill the man. That he would make no bones about killing me—could he do so with safety to himself—I already knew; and though for my part I would rather have him alive than dead, I was determined that should I once again lay hands on him, and be compelled to make choice between taking his life or allowing him to regain his liberty, I should unhesitatingly choose the former alternative. This being the situation, our next meeting promised to be not uneventful, and for myself I must confess that I looked for that meeting with an appetite that was almost savage.

Now that I was regaining my strength, it was a relief to me, if the truth be told, to turn my thoughts from such soft and unaccustomed subjects as loverings, kisses and bosomings, to occupation of a sterner kind. This was not because there was any lessening of my love to Joyce, but because it seemed to me that no man worthy of the name would look upon love merely as a blissful condition in which he is content idly to rest. Love's call comes from the battlefield, not from the rose-strewn bower. Love awakens a man to real life; it does not lull into a delicious dream. For the sake of the woman he loves, he should wish to fight and face, not to forego, the world. Her love should be his highest incentive to work, his noblest inspiration to achieve.

About the task I had set myself there was little enough of romance and less of knight-errantry, but in clapping Norman into jail I should rid society of a menace, and might hope to set at liberty the woman I loved.

The reader will remember that at the commencement of this narrative I spoke of three clues upon which to work—three lines of investigation to pursue. The first clue was concerned with the disappearance of Lady Southborne. That particular clue I had

at first followed with some success, but had finally been compelled to acknowledge myself beaten, and to turn my attention to Clue Number Two.

The keyword to Clue Number Two was "Joyce Fairfax." Seeing this lady's name upon Norman's list, I had anticipated—with what result the reader knows—that she had been marked down for abduction. Like the hunter who looks for the lion in the neighbourhood of the quarry, I hoped that she might be the means by which I might come upon the heels of Norman. There again I had scored a half success, to be confronted and confounded finally by abject failure, for not only had I been unable to prevent Norman from carrying out his purpose, but I was now absolutely without a clue to the whereabouts of the vanished Joyce. My investigations in St. Albans and the neighbourhood I need not here recount in detail. That I did not spare myself, the reader may be sure, but all my efforts were barren of any result, and my only consolation lay in the fact that the police were apparently as much at fault as I.

To Clue Number Three—Inspector Norman—I must now direct my attention, and I blamed myself that I had not already set on

foot some inquiries as to the man's identity. My first acquaintance with the fellow dated from the day of Lady Southborne's abduction, when I had seen him address the marquis and the station master at St. Pancras. On that occasion he had described himself as a detective. That he was a member of the police force I did not for a moment believe; though I was sensible of the man's cunning in assuming the rôle in question, for by leading the marquis and the station master to suppose that the case was in official hands, he had probably prevented the despatch of a messenger to the nearest police station, and meanwhile his confederates were making good their escape. Moreover, his ruse had been successful in other ways. He had not only detained in conversation the two persons whose activity was most to be feared, but had also cleverly contrived to put them upon a false scent.

Reviewing these and other facts which had subsequently come to my knowledge concerning Norman, I arrived at the conclusion that, although I did not believe him to be a police officer, there was cause to suspect that he had at one time in his life served in such a capacity. The marks which a year or two in the "force" put upon a man are not difficult to recognize. I had seen In-

spector Norman stand at salute to Lord Southborne at St. Pancras station, and what was more to the point, I had noticed the manner in which he had stood "at attention" in my doorway on the morning when he had called upon me, and that for a moment his hand had fluttered up, palm outward, as if to accord me an official greeting.

Then he had recollected that he was there in his private capacity, and his hand had dropped again, but involuntary actions like that are not to be disregarded. It must also be remembered that in coming forward at St. Pancras and claiming to be a detective the man ran considerable risks, for which so astute a person was not likely to be unprepared. If any genuine representative of Scotland Yard had chanced to be on the spot, he might have questioned Norman's credentials, detaining the pretended police officer pending inquiries; and by a man engaged, as Norman was, in nefarious undertakings, inquiries are not courted.

Although Lord Southborne and the station master had assumed, as Norman had wished them to assume, that his connexion with the police force was official, the reader will remember that Norman himself had merely said that he was "a detective." Had he been accused of unlawfully personating

a police officer, he would probably have replied, "I didn't claim to be a police officer. I merely said that I was a detective, and I thought it very possible that his lordship would prefer placing the matter in private hands," an explanation which would in all probability have been accepted, in which case Norman would have lost no time in making off. It struck me then as very probable that he was a private detective, who had at one time been in the "force." That a smart police detective who has, let us suppose, quarrelled with a bullying superior officer, and been compelled to resign, should, by becoming a private detective, turn to account the information he has gained while in the force, is not an unreasonable supposition.

Or it might be that the fellow's motives for retiring had been less creditable. A change of character is not brought about by a change of clothes, and the ways of a man, who is crooked by nature, will be crooked even if he wear that emblem of justice and integrity, the uniform of a policeman.

To cut the matter short, let me say that it struck me, on thinking things over, that were I myself in the position of those responsible for these abductions, and in want of an unscrupulous but able man to carry out

my instructions, I should know where to look for him. It seemed to me that a private detective who had once been a police detective, but had been dismissed from the force on account of misconduct, would be a very likely man to serve my purpose. Knowing as he would, and from personal experience, how the police go to work for the detection of crime, he would necessarily know how best to go to work to evade official researches, and it struck me as by no means unlikely that herein lay the secret of Norman's success.

Whether the theory by which I assumed Norman to be an ex-policeman, or an ex-detective, were right or wrong, could only be proved by putting it to the test, and as a theory of some sort was necessary for working purposes, and no more likely theory presented itself, I decided to make it the basis of my operations. A man with the physical infirmity from which Norman suffered should not be difficult to trace, in the police force or out of it, for no one who had ever seen him would be likely to forget the spasmodic snarl-and-grin affection of the facial muscles of which I have several times had occasion to speak.

Among my friends was a very able private detective named Grant, whom, as I was not yet well enough to get about, I asked to

undertake the case for me. I gave him an exact description of Norman's personality and peculiarities, and indicated briefly the reason which led me to adopt the theory that the man for whom I was looking had once been in the police force.

The result was not favourable to my theory, which Grant ridiculed, describing me as "theory-mad," and asking me where I had been all these years that I did not know that every candidate for the force undergoes a medical examination, and that no doctor would pass a man suffering from such a nervous affection as I had described.

I replied, telling Grant that this aspect of the case had already occurred to me, but asking him whether it were not possible that Norman's affection was the result of an accident, an illness, or a shock, which had happened subsequently to his joining the force; whether, in fact, it might not be the reason of his resignation or dismissal? To this Grant returned that my police force theory would not hold water, that to pursue inquiries in that direction would be mere waste of time, and that if he were to undertake the case, he must be left free to formulate his own theories, and not be hampered by the preconceived theories of other people.

In my opinion Grant had and has no equal for astuteness, in the police force or out of it, but his one weak point is that he is incapable of considering fairly any theory which does not emanate from himself. Did I to-day wish him to investigate upon lines I had myself laid down, I should go to work more artfully than I did then, and should, as it were, drop in his way the clue I wished him to pick up, so that he might believe he had found it for himself, in which case he would be all enthusiasm, whereas, did it appear to come from me, he would toss it impatiently aside. But at the time of which I am writing I was not alive to this weakness of his, and as I had the best of reasons for placing absolute confidence in his judgment, I agreed that he should go to work in his own way, with the result that my police force theory was set aside. Had I not so agreed, my task had been shortened by many days, and it is possible that a terrible calamity might have been averted.

Nearly a fortnight passed, and as Grant had practically discovered nothing, and I was now quite recovered, I decided to become my own agent, and to put my rejected police force theory to the test. My earliest discovery however, was concerned, not with Norman's antecedents, but with myself.

The very first day I went out I discovered that I was being shadowed by a short dark man, with a strut in his walk, and a black beard. The only person who was likely to cause me to be shadowed was, of course, the very man for whom I was looking—Norman himself. The game thus far had gone in his favour, for he had undoubtedly proved himself to be the craftier of the two. Yet for all his affected and perhaps deserved contempt of myself and of my methods, the fact remained that once or twice I had succeeded in getting him into a corner, and knowing, as he probably did, that I was a man of some tenacity of purpose, he was not likely to leave my movements unwatched. Moreover, he had another and more excellent reason for wishing to keep an eye upon me. The document of which I had obtained possession, on the morning when he had interrupted me at breakfast, had been burnt in the fire by which my chalet in Epping Forest had been destroyed. Norman was clearly not aware of this fact, for when he and his accomplices had overpowered me in the train between Barking and Rainham, it was of this document that Norman had spoken, it was for this document that they had searched my pockets, and even examined the lining of my clothes. So long as Norman supposed

the incriminating document to remain in my possession, so long would it be to his interest to have me watched. If the man who was shadowing me were his agent, and in communication with him, it was possible that by shadowing the shadower I might come to learn the whereabouts of Norman himself.

Clearly then my next move must be to clap a shadower upon my shadower's track, so I wrote to Grant telling him the facts, and asking him to devote all his energies to shadowing the shadower, and if possible to finding out by whom the short dark man was employed.

The task of ascertaining whether anyone answering to Norman's name or description had ever been in the police force, I reserved for myself. Had I known where a roll, giving the names of those who had either been dismissed from the force, or had of their own accord resigned, was to be seen, that roll I should have made it my first business to overhaul. Whether such a roll existed I did not know, so, as is my custom in such cases, I sought the assistance of a journalist. A journalist's information on any particular subject may be neither exact nor exhaustive, for his business is to keep the public informed upon current events, not to constitute himself a walking encyclopaedia upon all subjects, but he can generally tell

you, and at a moment's notice, where to look for the information you require.

"Have I any information filed away upon the subject of dismissals from the police force?" said my friend Parker, when I called upon him at the office of the newspaper he edits. "No, I can't say I have, for I, as editor, have to look after the paper as a whole, and don't concern myself with the different departments into which it's divided, and each of which is in charge of a 'sub.' But come along with me and we'll see what can be done."

He opened a door leading into a room where a long lank man sat at an American desk.

"Morning, Tomlinson! This" (with a wave of the hand towards myself) "is my friend, Mr. Max Rissler, whose chief aim in life appears to be to endow harmless little books with titles that appal. He's got something of that sort up his sleeve now, and has come here to pick our brains." Then he turned to me. "This is Mr. Tomlinson, who does the obituary notices in our second page."

I bowed to Mr. Tomlinson, who bowed gravely and decorously in return, and—I could not help thinking—looked me up and down like a literary undertaker who was prepared to perform my last literary obse-

quies at a moment's notice, as indeed I soon discovered was the case. In the corner of the room stood a piece of furniture not unlike a great wardrobe. Mr. Tomlinson solemnly unlocked it, revealing innumerable pigeon holes in which newspaper cuttings of all sorts were carefully filed. He stretched a thin hand towards a pigeon hole marked "R." "Ripon, Marquis of," he muttered, "Ripon, Bishop, Rippman, Professor, Rissler, Max—here we are."

Neatly as a fisherman landing his "catch," and without displacing the other papers, he jerked out upon the table a budget of cuttings, marked with my name. Then he slipped off the elastic band, and handed me the roll with a bow.

I opened it, and with astonishment, for here seemed to be every press reference to myself of which I was aware, and any number that were unknown to me.

"We are rather short of copy just at present, Mr. Rissler," said the obituary editor sadly. "If by any chance you should meet with an accident, as you might—who knows? who knows?—a fatal accident, that is, on your road home to-day, I think I could promise you a quarter of a column in to-morrow's issue."

"You are more than kind," I said. "And

I'm flattered and honoured by your invitation, but I'm afraid—just a little afraid—that I must ask you to excuse me. If you could make it convenient on another occasion——"

"Pardon me," interrupted Mr. Tomlinson with dignity, "but you must remember that the circumstance I mentioned is exceptional. In the usual way we should consider a brief paragraph adequate—amply adequate—and, of course, if Parliament were sitting and we were very much pressed, you *might* be lumped in with the general obituaries, and only get a line. But I hope not; I hope not."

"Yes," I said. "So do I. I'm not exacting, but I draw the line at being lumped in, as you call it, with the general obituaries."

Mr. Tomlinson shrugged his shoulders and extended his hands palms upwards, as who should say—

"There's no pleasing some people!"

"However it wasn't about my own last sad rites that I came to see you, Mr. Tomlinson," I explained. "I'm interested just at present in the subject of dismissals from the police force. Can you help me?"

Without a word Mr. Tomlinson stalked out of the room, returning presently with a big portfolio tucked under his arm.

"My friend Mr. Macnaughton, in whose

hands all police court matters are, is away in the country, investigating a murder, in the interests of our paper. Things are terribly slack in the obituary way just now. I hoped to have required my notice of the Pope this morning, for he was reported to be sinking fast last night, but now he's better again. However, fortunately his case is exceptional. You see his notice has been standing in type for many years, and the frequent alterations and additions that his living so long make necessary, come very expensive."

Mr. Tomlinson sighed deeply and looked at me as if to imply that if I had any influence at the Vatican, it was clearly my duty to see to it that the Pope was spoken to by somebody and promptly.

As I, however, made no reply he shook his head three times sadly.

"In Mr. Macnaughton's absence," he said, "I have undertaken the charge of his department. His are the most marvellously kept files in London. They should be worth £1,000 to any journalist. In his absence I have access to them and this particular portfolio deals with police dismissals.

He opened the portfolio as if he were a clergyman about to read a lesson from the Bible. Then suddenly his whole manner

changed and he became the eager, excited journalist. "It's marvellous, marvellous!" he said enthusiastically, almost reverently. "There are no other such files in all London —in all the world—as his!"

"Police—Police, Action Against. Police Blackmailing. Police Bribery"—his long fingers were with almost incredible rapidity turning over a number of pieces of tissue paper—"flimsies" he called them—that were carefully filed away. Police Bribery, Police Court Magistrate, Police Court Ventilation. Police Court—oh, we can pass all that. D. Letter D we want. Yes, here we are Police, Dangers run by—Police Dark Lantern. Police Dismissals—that's the ticket. "H'm, h'm, h'm. Yes. Now tell me exactly what you want."

I told him that I wanted to find out whether a man named Norman had within the last few years been dismissed from the force for misconduct of any sort.

"I know the very man for you," he said. "Police-Sergeant Lee. He's retired now and means to write a book upon the History of the Police Force. He's been collecting materials all his life. Soon after he had retired I got him to let me interview him upon his experiences, and excellent copy he made. What he can't tell you about the

police, past and present, isn't worth knowing. Here's his address. You can mention me to him, and if he can't help you, come and look me up again. Just one word in your ear, however. Don't offer him money. The old boy's by no means badly off. He married the widow of a very well to do tradesman, and has more than enough for his requirements, with a wide margin for any luxuries he may fancy. Treat him as an equal; above all, treat him as a literary man, and there's nothing he won't do for you; but offer him money, and his pride will be up in arms.

"And now I'm afraid I must run away. I'm expecting every minute to hear that the dear old Pope's gone. So sad, isn't it! But for him, as for Tennyson, there must come at last 'The one clear call.' His has been a long time coming. But that line of Tennyson's is very beautiful isn't it? So glad to have seen you. Good-bye."

He gave me a friendly smile, a cold hand, a nod of the head, and then his willowy figure undulated towards the door with a curious gliding movement and was gone.

"Exit the journalist: enter the ex-police sergeant!" I said to myself. "And if the ex-policeman show, to an entire stranger, one half the courtesy shown by the journalist, I shall consider myself fortunate."

And fortunate I proved to be, for ex-Sergeant Lee received me very kindly, and when I told him who had sent me protested with evident sincerity that it would be a pleasure to him to be of service to any friend of Mr. Tomlinson. He was quite by way of being a character, for a more curious mixture of shrewdness and simplicity I have seldom met. His vulnerable point was clearly his vanity, yet, if I mistake not, that same vanity was his surest defence. Get him to talk about himself or his hobbies, and the man seemed a very child in worldly wisdom. The little ruses by which he sought to show himself in a favourable light were so transparent that the densest of mortals could scarcely fail to see through them, yet shift your ground from himself, and his hobbies, to other matters, and the eyes that looked out at you from under his brows were as shrewd as ever were set in human head.

"Sergeant Lee," I said, coming to the point at once, "I'm told that you know more about the police force, past and present, than any other living man."

The Inspector bowed gravely, as one who accepts a deserved tribute to his greatness.

"Do you remember if there was ever any one in the force of the name of Norman."

"Several: one was discharged for blackmailing about two years ago."

"That is very likely the very man I want. Did you know him personally?"

"Yes, I knew him very well. One of the smartest fellows in the force and very pleasant spoken. Bit of a gentleman in his way, too, and came, I think, of a good stock. But a bad egg, sir, as it turned out, a bad egg."

"What was he like?"

"Like? Oh a fine made chap, tall and big. Fair hair and blue eyes. I saw him again the other day it chanced—quite the gentleman in his dress, and flush of money, I should think, for he was driving a motor car. Seemed uncommon pleased with himself about something. As he went by I saw that he was grinning all over his face."

"How long ago was that?" I asked, for the exasperating suspicion that possibly it was I who had been the object of Norman's mirth occurred to me as the Inspector spoke.

"Stop a moment, sir, till I look at my diary. I can tell you to the day. Let me see—yes, here it is—the 21st—a Thursday and late in the afternoon."

I smiled grimly. The date the ex-police sergeant mentioned was the date of my dis-

comfiture, the date of my runaway ride with Norman in the motor car.

"You haven't seen him since?" I asked.

"Oh, yes I have, but may I make so bold as to ask what you want to know for?"

"Oh, more than one reason, but one will do. The fact is, sergeant, that like yourself I'm a bit of a literary aspirant. In fact, I've already written two or three detective stories."

"You don't say that," he exclaimed at once. "Did you put your name to them, sir?"

"Yes," I said modestly. Then brightening in my turn: "Why hang me, if there aren't two of them on your shelf. This is fame indeed. Those two over there in the right-hand corner of the bottom shelf."

"Then you're Mr. Rissler?"

"That's my name."

He shook his head mournfully. "You're no policeman, sir; you're no policeman! Many's the time I've said it. And what's more, you never will be."

He spoke with the finality and solemnity of a judge pronouncing a death sentence. It was not the first time in my life that, remembering the insignificance of my little scribblings, I had had cause to feel small, but never before had I felt my personal in-

consequence quite so keenly as when thus authoritatively informed that I was "no policeman." Had Lee charged me with being "no gentleman," I should have felt the sting of it less bitterly, consoling myself with the thought that he was not altogether an infallible judge. But thus to be stigmatized as "no policeman," and by a member of the force, was quite another matter. To me it was like standing in the dock to hear the foreman of a representative jury of my fellow countrymen inform the court of the fact that I had been found "guilty on all counts."

"Think not?" I asked weakly.

"No, sir; I don't think. I'm sure," was his emphatic reply.

Then perhaps, out of consideration for my evident depression, he added more cheerfully—

"But I don't mind shaking hands with you as a brother author."

I shook.

"Come, this is better," I said to myself, brightening up a little. Then aloud, "Well, anyway you're one of us, aren't you? And you won't be the first wearer of the blue uniform who has distinguished himself in the arts."

"We do our best, sir; we do our best," he

answered modestly. "And now, what is it you want to know about Norman?"

"Mr. Lee," I said, "I am going to speak to you not in your official, or rather ex-official, capacity, but as a member of the fraternity of writers. I'm going to be frank with you, as one should with a fellow craftsman. You have trusted me thus far and I'm going to trust you in return, for though as you say I'm no policeman, I flatter myself that I'm a fairly good judge of character, and I'm perfectly sure that you are not the man to betray a confidence. I'm going to tell you what I want Norman for, and when you hear what I have to say, I think you'll admit that I have a good reason for wishing to see him between four walls."

Then I told my story.

I had not miscalculated the effect it would have upon my man. "I'm very glad you have told me all this, sir," he said frankly. "If you'd come here and tried to wheedle information out of me, as some people have done before now, leaving me in the dark as to what they wanted it for, I shouldn't have told you much more than I have already told. But you have taken me into your confidence and I'll take you into mine, for it so happens that I can put you upon the track of the man you want.

I've retired from the force some little time now, but old habits aren't got rid of in a day, sir, and—entirely for my own amusement—I do a little bit in the amateur way, now and then. I told you I'd seen Norman (Newman is the name he's sailing under now) doing the swell in a motor car. Well, that I didn't take much notice of; but when a day or two after I saw him driving by in a cab, with his beard shaved off and his hair dyed, I says to myself, 'Hullo, sir, what's the meaning of this? and what little game are you after now? Something shady, I'll wager my truncheon and helmet.' Well, sir, time hangs a bit heavy on one's hands when one takes to playing at being the gentleman after nigh on twenty years hard work in the force, and having nothing better to do, I said to myself, 'Lee, my boy,' says I, 'you've done a lot of reading of detective novels lately—Conan Doyle and Arthur Morrison and all the rest of them—supposing you take a turn at it yourself and see what you can make of your old pal Norman.' So, sir, I whips into a cab and follows him up to Fenchurch Street Station and heard him book to Benfleet, so I did the same, just to find out where he's living and what he calls himself."

"Did you succeed?" I asked eagerly.

"Yes, sir. Newman's the name he goes by, and he's bought a little farmhouse—more of a cottage than a farm—right at the west end of Canvey Island and he lives there all by himself, when he isn't in town, which he comes up and down to pretty often. It's a lonely place, for he's all by himself, without so much as a servant to cook his meals, and there isn't another house within a mile. That's all I know, sir, and if the information's any use to you, you're welcome to it, for I don't suppose I should ever have gone any further in the business myself."

I thanked the good ex-sergeant suitably, even effusively, for I could see he expected it, and then put my leading question—

"What about the curious nervous grimace which I have described to you in my man? That, of course, is my most certain way of identification. Had the Norman you used to know, or the Newman you traced to the cottage in Canvey, anything of the sort?"

Ex-Sergeant Lee prefaced his answer by thumping the table violently with his brawny fist.

"Not so much as a shadow of it," he said triumphantly.

I did not feel like sympathizing with his elation. In fact, if the ex-sergeant were right, I saw cause for depression rather than for joy.

"Then what the deuce is the good of the man to me!" I snapped impatiently. "I don't care whether he's Naggs or Nobbs or Newman or Norman, so long as he isn't the man I want; and if he hasn't any such nervous facial affection as I have described to you, it is very clear that he isn't the man who abducted Miss Fairfax."

The irritability I felt and, I fear, manifested, was not allayed by the fact that the ex-policeman wagged from side to side in the chair, his fat body convulsed meanwhile by fits of hearty but absolutely silent laughter.

"Oh, hang it all, sergeant," I said. "When you have done, perhaps you'll help me on with my coat and let me go. I'm glad it amuses you so, but to me the thing's too serious to be funny. I'm very much obliged to you for all the courtesy you have shown me, but really I can't spare the time to wait here while you have your laugh out."

Before I began to speak he was merely wagging from side to side between his extraordinary and to me uncanny fits of silent laughter. Now he literally rocked backward and forwards in a very ecstasy of delight, lifting his huge feet from the ground and doubling up his legs to his body until I began to fear he was about to have a fit.

"Look here!" I said. "You'll die of suppressed hilarity. Laugh aloud for heaven's sake, man, or you'll burst and lift the roof off. Why, if there happened to be a pin anywhere in your clothing and the point of it so much as touched your skin, you'd pop like a blown air-bladder."

All in an instant his laughter ceased and he "sat" at "attention" (if I may use the phrase) as erectly as a soldier stands at that attitude on parade. With his back squared to the chair back, with his shoulders stiff and straight and his hands folded in front of him he looked at me in silence for fully a quarter of a minute. Then he shook his head pityingly, and the oracle spoke.

"You're no policeman, sir," he said patronizingly.

I shot rather than rose from my chair and began, unassisted, to get into my coat.

"No," I snapped angrily as I walked to the door.

"No!" I repeated much more loudly as I took up my hat. "*No!*" I shouted walking back to where the ex-policeman sat staring at me stolidly. "NO! NO! NO! Confound you, NO—thank Heaven for it! or I should have been murdered long ago—and small blame to the man who did it—if I made myself half such a poll-parrotty magpie as

you. How many more times are you going to tell me I'm no policeman? Do you think I came here to be made fun of? Do you think a man who knows that the woman he loves is in the hands of one of the greatest scoundrels unhanged, and who's moving heaven and earth to find that scoundrel and snatch the woman he loves out of that villain's clutch—do you think a man who's braced himself to a task of that sort, and whose every nerve is strained to the work, wants to bandy feeble jokes with the officer to whom he's appealed to help him—— But, there, sergeant, you didn't mean to annoy me, I know. My temper's none of the best at any time, and just now my nerves are all on the tingle. I'm very much obliged to you for the time you've given me and for doing your best to help. But I'm on the wrong tack, that's clear, and must try back."

"Stop a bit, sir! Stop a bit, sir," he said soothingly. "You mustn't be angry with me for having my laugh out. I couldn't help it, you know."

"Help it!" I said. "No, I suppose not. No rational human being would go on the way you did unless it were a case of 'couldn't help it.' And it wasn't because you had your laugh 'out' but because you had it 'in'

that I objected. No one was ever the worse for an honest laugh yet, but the obscene unholy silent risible rites you indulge in——"

"Easy, sir! Easy does it!" interrupted the ex-sergeant. "I beg your pardon, sir, but aren't you an Irishman?"

"Now look here," I said, "you've rubbed it into me enough about not being a policeman, but I'm not going to be called an Irishman by you or any one else! Understand that!"

"Where's the offence? It's an Irishman you are, isn't it?"

"Yes; but I know your English ways. It's 'Well done, Ireland!' 'Three cheers for the green isle! the sister country! the brave boys that they are!' so long as you want something out of us—to starve for you, to fight for you, to die for you! But it's 'Curse you for an Irishman,' or 'Get along, you Irishman, you!' the moment the two of us fall out."

"Begorra, it's you and me'll be falling out if you call me an Englishman again," roared he, relapsing under excitement into his native tongue. "It's as good an Irishman as yerself I am, any day, and let the man as wants to deny it put up the two fists of him in fair fight. Sit ye down, sir; sit ye down. I think none the worse of ye for your hot

words. Man alive! Why didn't you say you were Irish when you began your crack? It wasn't till ye got a bit hot that the touch of the Paddy slipt out. And it's a Greek or a Jew or a German that you might be by the name of you. 'Max Rissler!' bedad! Where got you the like of that for a name!"

"Oh, it isn't my real name," I said. "It's only one I've assumed for my detective and literary work. Like yourself, I expect, I was educated out of Ireland, and that's how the two of us have lost our brogue. And now what do you advise me to do about the abduction, since you are good enough to say you'll help me, and since the man I want isn't the man you traced to Canvey?"

"Who said so?" inquired my newly discovered fellow countryman.

"You did—or at all events you said that your man had no nervous facial affection—which amounts to the same thing, for mine has, and it's by that same facial affection that I hoped to trace him."

"You'll be a long time over it," said Lee drily. "Man alive! it's because of that, I called you no policeman. Where's the wits of you? If you'd ever been a policeman, instead of an amateur who only writes books about crime, you'd from the very first have distrusted that infallible

method of identifying and tracing the man you want by his curious spasmodic grin. My opinion is that Newman *is* the man you want, and that your man assumed that grin of his to mislead you and put you off the track. He's just the trickster to do it if he's the Norman I used to know. If he could only once get you to believe that the man you wanted was as easy to identify as all that—why, even if you got hot on the real man's traces, and found he had no such physical infirmity as you had expected, you might be induced to think you had gone astray, and to go off upon another clue. It wouldn't be the first time that I have known a tricky criminal 'fake up' something by which everybody felt sure they could identify him. I knew one rascal who shammed lameness for years. Then when he was wanted the word was passed to all the police stations over the country to look out for a lame man, and they let the very fellow, they were all watching for, slip through their hands and out of the country, because he walked past them without a limp."

"Great Heavens, Lee! what a fool I've been and how infinitely obliged to you I am. Man alive, if I can help you in preparing your book (and I *am* a bit of a penman if, as you have told me and have now sufficiently

dowed here, I know, or I
instead of calling. Whet
thing to report or not I
Canvey to-night to see wh
yours are the same. My
Greenhithe and I shall ge
down this evening on the
somewhere near the lonely
where you say the cottage
It will be easier to keep m
go by boat than if I go to
and walk across the island
infinitely obliged to you.
from me soon. Again a
and good-bye."

At the Savage Club I fo
letter from Grant—

"My Dear Rissler

the hair, under the skin would show blue. There is no such blue on his chin and cheeks, and that his hair is fair naturally is a moral certainty. He and your shadower met at the Monument and the two of them walked together to Fenchurch Street Station. I rather fancy they fear being watched, for, while the big man took a ticket, the other man stood outside the station and kept an eye upon all passers. So I couldn't get near enough to the ticket office to hear to what station the big man booked. But he bade the shadower good-bye at the barrier and got into the Southend train, and the shadower stood just outside the barrier till the train started so as to see who went through. Under these circumstances I thought it best not to show myself, but I'm going on to Southend by next train to pursue inquiries and send you this to report progress. The only point which bothers me is that the man I am following *has no such* affection of the face as you spoke of.

"Always yours,

"RICHARD GRANT."

"It doesn't bother me—now—my dear Grant," I said to myself as I folded up his letter. "Here goes for a cab home, and then by train to Greenhithe and by boat to Can-

cottage at the western e
and rapped gently a
voice which bade me er
ably the voice of Norn



CHAPTER XXII

THE JACKAL TAKES A LONG JUMP

"GOOD-EVENING, Mr. Norman," I said pleasantly. "How history repeats itself! The first time you called upon me at my chalet at Epping, you found me at breakfast with a newspaper propped before me. And now that for the first time I have the pleasure of returning the call and of finding you at home, you are at supper—also with a newspaper propped before you. Except for the difference between breakfast and supper, and for the fact that, on the occasion I refer to, you left my room and then reentered, covering me with a pistol, whereas I have taken the liberty of bringing my revolver with me on my first entrance, and hold you most conveniently covered—no, don't move, I shall not shoot so long as you remain quiet—the situation is very much the same. Again I must warn you not to move. I see the butt end of a revolver sticking out of that hip-pocket of yours to which your hand is accidentally stealing. I am going to take it with my left hand and shall have to place the

barrel of my own revolver a little closer to your chest, so as to hold you more conveniently covered while I do so, in case of accidents. I can't trust you to hand me the pistol yourself. You might give it me barrel foremost and with your hand on the trigger, whereas I prefer to take it by the butt. Quite quiet now! a movement of any sort on your part might be awkward. Thank you. We shall talk with less fear of accidental interruption, now that you're unarmed. You can wipe that perspiration off your forehead if you like (it will be in your eyes in a minute) and you needn't sit so stiffly in your chair. I don't want you to make yourself unnecessarily uncomfortable, now that you've made me a present of your revolver. That's better. You look more at home. Now we can discuss the situation to better advantage."

"What do you want?" he said in a dry throaty voice. He was cowering back in his chair, doddering like an old man in the abjectness of his terror, his silly mouth agape so loosely that he had some difficulty in pulling it sufficiently together to articulate the words.

"Several things. Miss Fairfax's address for one. You know where she is?"

"Yes; yes, you shall have it," he said eagerly. The look of the craven was still in

his eyes, but they had suddenly grown cunning, and into his voice had crept a hopeful note which told me that the man was wondering whether he might not yet make terms.

"Yes, Mr. Rissler. Yes. I was going to write to you about Miss Fairfax. I swear to God I was, and that I don't mean her any harm. I was thinking perhaps that if I set her at liberty, you'd be so very good as to return to me the papers that you sto— that you exchanged with me that day I ventured to call upon you."

So this was the game he was playing, was it? He had got to know in some way of my love for Joyce, and was holding her as a sort of hostage, hoping to strike a bargain with me by which perhaps he should get his papers back, and go scot free, in return for Joyce's restoration to her friends.

"You know where she is?" I asked sternly.

"Yes; yes! She's safe and well. Not a hair of her head is harmed."

"You abducted her?"

"Not exactly abducted, Mr. Rissler. It wasn't that—it wasn't really. Every care has been taken and no violence was used. I can explain everything to your satisfaction in a few minutes' conversation. But I can't talk with that cursed brain-scatterer staring



features physical fear
a change. He had l
self-satisfied, prosperou
and had about his "
redness which general
as the phrase goes, is in
himself well." Yet alr
haggard and attenuated.
his cheeks and jaws seem
under the nervous stra
hung flabby and unhe
little hollows on either
around his mouth sagge
shaven jaws looked lank,
had winced as from a blow
the words I have last set d
was something almost im

"Oh, don't, don't! I
inviting a fatality—

see you and me come to a perfect understanding."

"The time has gone by for words, Norman," I said sternly. "You objected to my calling you names on one occasion. There'll be no calling of names this time and no discussion of terms. Here is my ultimatum. You can take it or leave it—which you please. Now listen. My proper course, and the safest—for you are tricky as the devil—would be to hand you over to the police right off. But I have a little score of my own to settle first, and there won't be much satisfaction to me in merely seeing you walked off—like a poor devil who's stolen a loaf—to the nearest station. When we two met, I invited you to stand up to me like a man, and let us fight it out between us which was the better. I wanted that fight as I haven't wanted many things in my life before, but you baulked me of it then. You won't baulk me now. It's cost me a lot of time and trouble to find you, and I'm going to have some satisfaction out of you for all my trouble before we part. You are coming out with me this moment to the farmyard at the back of the house, and we'll see who's the better man. If I beat you, you shall take me to where Miss Fairfax is, and set her, and all the other victims of your vile conspiracy, free. And when

"Come now, I hav
offer, and given you
deserve. Is it to be 'y
"No, sir. I can't
locked up at once. I'm
"I'm sorry. I heard
ting the bulge on so
day, and you've certa
on me on more than
night I had hoped to ge
back, as they say, and I
find you won't give me
It's poor sport bashing a
stand up to one, but bas
to be, and if you won't
in fair fight, you'll have t
If you put up your fists y
chance of doing the ba
You're no older

It is always your coward who can least endure the taunt of cowardice, and my words flicked whip-like—as I intended they should—at the raw wound of his pride, stinging him for the moment into a show of spirit that I suspect surprised even himself.

"Yes," he said, looking at me wickedly. "Bashing, as you call it, is just the thing to appeal to a coarse-mouthed costermonger-souled creature like you. Among the class I belong to, gentlemen settle their differences another way. Black eyes and swelled lips, and knocked-out teeth and bloody noses may be counted honourable scars among bargees, schoolboys, and butchers, whereas in my station of life——"

"Mr. Norman," I said coldly, interrupting him, "I know you too well to suppose for a moment that in proposing a duel you have any serious thought of standing up to me to fight out a fair fight to a finish. What is in your mind I don't know, but it is trickery of some sort I am sure. Perhaps you are expecting the advent of an accomplice shortly, and propose a duel as a pretext to gain time in preliminaries. Swords you are not likely to have here; and though we can easily be provided with pistols, I do not choose to give the kind of person, that I know you to be, the chance of playing tricks. Don't misunder-

stand me, however. That is not my reason for speaking as I do. Just now you used the word "gentleman"—presumably in connexion with yourself. A word that comes freshly soiled from use in your mouth, I prefer to pass over, so I'll say instead that it is only with one's equals that one fights a duel, whereas one is at liberty to administer personal castigation with fists or a horsewhip even to such scum of scoundrelism as yourself. Where will you have it? Here or outside; for, by the God who made us! I can't keep my fingers off you much longer."

"I'll come out," he said sullenly, and out into the moonlight the two of us went without a word.

At the door he waited for me to precede him, but I, knowing better than to turn my back upon so crafty a ruffian, motioned silently that he should go first, and, as I still held him covered with my weapon, he obeyed. Through the farmyard we walked and out into the spongy marshland beyond.

"Where are we going to?" I asked, as he showed no disposition to stop.

"It's more level ground in the field the other side of the hedge," he answered, "and there are no dykes to fall into as there are here."

"But it's got the disadvantage, as you no

doubt are aware, of being nearer to the nearest group of cottages," I said. "Here no one can possibly hear us, whereas if we go into the next field it is just possible that if you shouted loud enough some one might come to interrupt us. It's here or nowhere, Norman. Off with your coat!" Mine was already on the ground.

"I won't fight," he said doggedly. "You can lock me up if you like, but you can't make me fight if I don't want to."

"Take off your coat and stand up to me!" I repeated hoarsely. Then, as he still slunk away, I followed and looked savagely into the cur's face of him.

"Do you want me to stick you up against a gate or a wall, like a sawdust-stuffed figure at a fair, while I pound you?" I asked. "Because that's what it will be if there's any more of this. Come, off with your coat. You'll have all the worse chance if you have to fight with it on."

Driven thus to bay he turned to face me, and, throwing back his coat at the shoulder with one hand, he caught the sleeve of it with the other, and began slowly to pull the thing off.

"That's better," I said, when he was at last in his shirt sleeves. "But you'll have the moonlight dead in your eyes where you

are. If you stand over here facing me, we shall get the light sideways and equally on us both."

With the coat slung across his arm he made as if to obey me, and then, suddenly flinging it over my head, he gave me a push in the chest that sent me staggering backwards into a ditch. Before I could recover myself he was twenty yards away, but I gave chase, and, being the quicker runner of the two, overtook him just as he was gathering himself together to jump one of the many salt water dykes by which the island is drained.

Having such a start he had thought this time to make good his escape, and when, catching him by the collar of his waistcoat, I slung him round facing me, his collapse was pitiful.

"Run away—would you! you white-livered jackal!" I said, hustling him with my breast to his and drawing up my arm to the shoulder for the blow.

"Come! up with your guard arm! Up with it! do you hear? I can't bring myself to strike even such a cur as you, till he's on his defence."

"Don't hit me! don't hit me, Mr. Rissler," he moaned, dropping all in a heap upon the ground as I squared up at him. "It's

not that I'm the coward you called me, but I'm not strong—I'm not really, for all my size. I'm extremely sensitive by nature—all the doctors say so, and I've had a hard life of it. I was unhappy even as a child, and used to go in terror of the other boys, for I always had a horror of being 'bashed,' as you call it, in a fight. It always seemed to me so ungentlemanly to have to go about with a black eye or a bloody nose. And because I wouldn't fight, the little cowards were more cruel than ever. Oh, I've had a hard life, a hard life. And you've done me harm enough for one man, as it is, Mr. Rissler, for it is through you that I have lost or shall lose the splendidly paid post I have. My principals got to know that you were on my track, and became frightened, and have told me that there are to be no more abductions and that I'm to take immediate steps to set free the people who have been abducted already. So I shall be out of the best paid job that a man ever had. My principals try to make out that it's conscience that's making them put a stop to any more abductions, and has made them decide to set free those who are already prisoners. But don't you believe it, sir. It's not conscience ; it is because they're found out, or are afraid of being found out. But no matter what the cause, I'm out of

the job, and it's your doing, Mr. Rissler. Don't you think that's enough harm for one man to do to another, without treating me as brutally as you have treated me to-day? Don't you, sir? I've played you some mean tricks, I know, but I mean to run straight now if you'll give me half a chance. I'm as sick of being a rogue as any poor devil can be. Say you cry 'even' with me, and I'll take you to where Miss Fairfax is, for she's still in England, right away. And remember that it's not me, but my principals, who are most to blame. A poor man is easily tempted, and it's the tempter, not the poor devil that is tempted, who ought to bear the punishment. I only yielded to the temptation that others put in my way, and I'm ready now, sir, to turn King's evidence. I'll withhold nothing. The person responsible for what has happened is entirely at my mercy. I've got that person in the hollow of my hand, and I'll lay bare everything, sir—everything. Shall we strike the bargain, Mr. Rissler? Shall we strike the bargain?"

"Great Heaven!" I said to myself, "what sort of a thing is this that has been made and sent into the world in the guise of a man?"

Then aloud: "Strike the bargain, you unutterable jackal! Strike a bargain of any

sort with you! No! I'm only glad I didn't soil my fists by using them upon your unclean carcase. I wouldn't fight with you now if you wanted it, but what I will do is cut a switch from the hedge and thrash you within an inch of your life where you lie. And if you attempt to run away meanwhile, I'll shoot you with your own pistol."

He looked up at me to see whether I were in earnest, and reading, I suppose, the menace in my eyes, made one more desperate dash for liberty.

Seizing me by the legs, as he knelt, he upset me into a sloe bush and again made off, this time so far ahead that I feared he would show me a clean pair of heels.

On the previous occasion, his running had been at random, but now he made a bee line for the farm where, as I afterwards discovered, he had a loaded rifle lying ready at hand. Had he succeeded in reaching the house in time to secure the weapon, this story would probably never have been written, for Norman would have waited until I was a few paces from the door, and then have shot me through the heart as I ran. And indeed it looked as if all the chances were in his favour, for while I was yet a score of yards away, he was scaling the back wall that skirted the farmyard. Right in front of him on the other side was

a huge rick of straw, against which, as he stood upon the wall-top, before jumping, his figure was silhouetted in the moonlight. Then with a hasty backward glance to see what distance separated him and me, he jumped, and the next instant there rang out the most terrible cry of agony these ears of mine have ever heard.

A labourer had been cutting straw from the rick, and, possibly to save himself the trouble of carrying his sickle home, had concealed it under the loose heap of straw at the rick base. It was upon this heap—perhaps to break his fall—that the unhappy Norman had jumped, and as he missed his footing and fell flat upon his face, the sickle, which apparently was lying point upward, had gone clean through the centre of his stomach and was sticking out like a tusk through the small of his back.

Describe more minutely the sight I saw when I came to Norman's assistance, I cannot. There were circumstances attending it too hideous to be told, and so hideous that even now I sicken to think of them. That he was—strangely enough—still conscious, added only to the horror of it all; for past all human help as he clearly was, and as he evidently knew himself to be, his agony of mind was if anything greater than his agony of body. Not

even to learn the whereabouts of my lost Joyce dare I intrude upon that death-scene to question Norman.

Of the two, the cries and groans that were the outcome of his physical anguish were less awful than the horrible utterances that bore witness to his abject terror and agony of mind. Hell itself might have been glad to stop its ears to the outpourings of a penitence more revolting than any blasphemy. Set down in cold blood the dying words of such a man, dying such a death, I cannot. It is enough to say that Norman died as he had lived—an abject, grovelling jackal, coward and cur.

CHAPTER XXIII

A "SCORE" TO SCOTLAND YARD

HAVING satisfied myself that neither upon Norman's person, nor at the farm-house, were there any papers connected with the abduction, I made my way to the spot where I had left my boat, and so returned to Gravesend and thence home to the room I was occupying at the Savage Club. I was exercised at first whether I ought or ought not to make known Norman's death to the police, but finally decided to remain silent and let things take their course. His death had been entirely accidental, and after the off-hand way in which the police had treated me when I paid a visit to New Scotland Yard, I did not feel disposed to reopen communication.

The information I had placed before them they had—so I had supposed—entirely disregarded. To this day I do not know whether I was wrong in so supposing, but I have reason to believe that while apparently affecting to attach no value to that information they had in reality made that information,

the basis of their investigations. Imagine my astonishment upon opening my evening paper, two days later, to find the following item of news displayed in large type :—

"THE GREAT ABDUCTION MYSTERY.

"THE NAME OF THE PRIME INSTIGATOR KNOWN AT LAST.

"*His Dead Body Discovered at Canvey Island.*

"We understand that the Police have for some time been aware that the prime instigator and mover in the matter of the mysterious abductions, which have caused such unprecedented panic all over the country, was a man calling himself Newman, or Norman. Needless to say, the man's whereabouts have been unknown to the police, or he would long ago have been arrested, but early yesterday morning a labourer, residing at Canvey, found under a straw rick the dead body of a Mr. Newman who has for some weeks resided in a small farmhouse at the end of the island. The unfortunate man had fallen, no doubt by accident, upon an ordinary reaping hook, and in such a way as completely to penetrate the abdomen, inflicting a terrible wound which the doctors are of opinion must have caused almost instantaneous death. Being well known in Canvey, no suspicions that Newman, or Norman, was

other than he pretended to be—an artist—was entertained on the island, but, when a description of the body was wired to London for purposes of identification, the New Scotland Yard authorities at once noticed that, except for the fact that the man they were looking for was bearded, whereas Newman was clean shaven, the two descriptions were identical. Suspicion being then aroused, Chief Inspector Taylor, who is in charge of the Abduction Case, at once proceeded to Canvey and has now satisfied himself that the dead man is none other than the missing Norman. Norman seems to have had unlimited means at his command, and we understand that the missing ladies are held captives upon a handsome and finely appointed steam launch which is now cruising somewhere among the South Sea Islands. The steam launch in question is called the *Urania*, and is manned by Chinese officers and crew, only one of whom speaks English. We are informed that the authorities have despatched a swift police boat in pursuit of the *Urania*, the speedy capture of which we shall hope soon to announce, and when that happy event takes place and the captured ladies, who there is reason to believe have received every consideration, are restored to their families and

friends, the mystery of their singular abductions and of Norman's motive for the crime, may be cleared up. At present it remains more mysterious than ever."

If I were correct in assuming that the information which I had lodged with the police had given them the first clue in regard to the abductions, I had, on the other hand, to admit that the discovery of the whereabouts of the missing ladies must be credited entirely to New Scotland Yard. I had from the first thought it likely that Norman had chosen a yacht for the place of concealment, and had, as the reader will remember, some reason for supposing it was at Tilbury that Lady Southborne had been taken on board.

The one question, however, to which I was now anxious to find the answer, was whether Joyce was, or was not, upon the *Urania*. My own opinion was that, although it had no doubt been Norman's intention sooner or later to convey her thither, no opportunity to do so had as yet been afforded him.

My reason for so supposing was not that Norman had assured me she was in England and had offered to take me to her, should I consent to let him go free,—for I thought it



in believing that the
cruising among the S
possibility of Joyce b
of the question, as th
recent for any ship to
in the time.

It was not long befc
score of Miss Fairfax's
at rest, for two days
announcement of the
body, I received the
my sister—

"DEAREST MAX,—

"Prepare yourself f
a glad surprise. Our
safe and sound at La
best of all, she hasn't
It seems, oh, rash yo
you and you only who
the poor girl's

of our lives for the last twelve months. I don't doubt, dear Max, that you had the best of reasons for giving the warning you did, but don't you think, old man, you would have been better advised to have informed the authorities, and seen that Joyce was put under special protection, instead of telling a timid girl of the fearful fate that threatened her? Anyhow, what you told her so preyed upon her mind (and small wonder, I think I should have done just the same in her case) and reduced her to such a state of abject terror, that she felt the only thing to do was to go away and hide herself. She was afraid even to take Helen Hampton into her confidence, for, as she says, the only way to keep a secret, is not to tell a single soul. How these abductors ferret out what they do, no one knows; but they appear to find out everything. I believe myself that, failing every other means, they'd have bribed a servant to eavesdrop, lest Helen might talk in her sleep, and so let out the secret of Joyce's address had she known it. Anyhow, Joyce says that had she told Lady Hampton where she was going, or why she was going, she'd never have had an easy moment, for she would have gone in constant terror lest, by intercepting letters, or pumping servants, or even by kidnapping Lady Hampton herself, the abduc-



worn to a shadow wit
by masked men and
chloroformed, to some
how relieved and glad
as we all were, to read
death of this monster, N
say, has been at the
dreadful conspiracy—th
could have been none of
ver, thank God he's deac
pass more villainy. H
are, you can hardly thin
the news of his death mus
terrified Joyce! Directly
came back to Hampton H
fretting her heart out wit
say that Joyce has behave
over it, and defends you
instead of abu

responsible for her guest's safety—and then to have gone to the police, instead of running the risk of killing the poor girl from shock by telling her anything half so awful. And I'm bound to say, my dear Max, that I think Helen Hampton is quite right, and that Joyce has behaved like a brick in sticking up for you. But for her I could never have made your peace with Helen and Sir Henry at all. However, it is all right now, and if you are still as much in love as ever, and would like to run down, we shall, as you know, be delighted to see you.

"Lovingly yours,

"CICELY."

"PS.—*Isn't* it a relief and a blessing to think that there's no more danger of being abducted! And what a pity Norman didn't live to be hanged! The next great public sensation will, of course, be the arrival of the *Urania* with all the poor dears on board. Won't they be the rage and the fashion this year!"

"PPS.—If you intend coming, please send me a wire."

So Norman had lied to the last! He had pretended that Joyce was in his power, and had offered to release her, in exchange for my allowing him his liberty. And all the



she might) and had
and gone no one kne
I did not see that she
wisely, or that I wa
for, had she remained
would assuredly have
my disablement to al
was my sister taking
having made my peace
and writing as if, in her
very lightly let off, cons
of my crime. So much
tude.

Almost angrily I thre
and, in doing so, saw for
though it finished on the
intimation to 'turn ov
third postscript had b
fourth leaf

the spur of the moment, decided to carry Joyce off to the sea. To follow them I did not dare, so as I felt rather out of sorts, I ran over to Holland for a week's skating.

On my return to town I paid a visit to my friend ex-policeman Lee, and to him related the manner in which Norman had met his death.

"I'm glad you told me," he said, "for you see I'm a policeman——"

"And I, as you have several times been good enough to remind me, am no policeman," I interpolated.

He smiled grimly. "I was going to say, sir, before you interrupted me, that I'm a policeman, or have been, and, having been a policeman, and knowing that you had probably been the last person who saw Norman alive, and that you hadn't exactly gone down to Canvey to ask him out to lunch —I wasn't easy in my mind, sir, as to whether it might not have been my duty as a policeman to have told what I knew. However, there didn't seem to have been any doubt at the inquest about his death being accidental, and now that I've heard your story, I feel easy in my mind again. But, tell me, sir, what about that grin, the grin that—because the man at Canvey hadn't got anything of the sort—made you so sure he wasn't



...ing my
perhaps because
stinctively that t
was to be our last,
was useless—had
friendly face of ex-p
"The grin?" I
that my companion
chair, consumed wit
"The grin? Oh,
where on Canvey, a
other fool found it."
The remark was a
silly, and the retort i
deserved.
"Ah! May be!
geant Lee, sobering
seen one fool who hail
and *his* grin was on
mouth

beside detective work, on which you could give me a salutary lesson."

"May be, sir! May be," he assented amicably. "Will you take an old fool's advice on quite another subject if he gives it to you?"

"I will and gratefully," I answered.

"Well, sir, one don't want to be very clever to know that you're very much in love with that young lady, Miss Fairfax. That is so, isn't it?"

"Yes, that is so," I said, "though I don't remember that I ever told you so."

"No, you didn't tell me, sir, I didn't want it. It strikes me that it's the young lady who needs to be told, not me. All that you've done up to now—so it seems to me—is to talk to her about detective work—to frighten the poor girl out of her senses, in fact. Can't you find something pleasanter to talk to a pretty girl about than that? She's back at St. Albans now. I read it in to-day's *Morning Post*—'Sir Henry and Lady Hampton and Miss Fairfax returned to St. Albans from Brighton yesterday.' What, didn't you know? Well, I never! But it's quite right. You'll see it for yourself if you look. And if you should happen to be going to St. Albans soon, you take my advice, sir, and play the lover instead of posing the other part.



to get out of th
suppressed laugh
required to give
If you go on in tl
have a fit—a six
to measure, and
with a suit of clo
need to run up any
The other hurry is
St. Albans, to act
bye, sergeant, and
been a good friend t
it. No, don't try
that laugh out, or th
I shall be wanted for
bye, I'm off."

As the front door
window of the room in
I had been sitting we



CHAPTER XXIV

TO DEATH TOGETHER

THE welcome I received at Hampton House, when I called the following afternoon, was not of the warmest. Lady Hampton's manner was fairly friendly, but Joyce, after an indifferent "How do you do?" and a cold handshake, immediately left the room. For a quarter of an hour Lady Hampton and I exchanged small talk and then I rose to go.

"Oh, you mustn't run away yet," she said; "I was just going to propose following Joyce to the ice. She was about to start for the lake when you came in. You haven't any skates with you, of course, but there are several spare pairs in the gun-room, and one of them would be sure to fit. I'll tell Ridley to give them a dusting and follow us down to the lake with them."

The lake was a small sheet of ornamental water in Lady Hampton's grounds. In the centre were two tiny islands, divided by a narrow channel of deep water spanned by a



And dips white
We bound and ber
We curve and ci
As a ship that swe
When storms are
We glide erect, the
We skim like swa
Tan-tan-tarra-
A-skating we
The jolliest sport in

"Whom is that
did you pick it up?
when she and I join
ice. "It's new to
"Don't know. C
volume of the *Cante*
gotten the author.'
Ridley, Lady Hamp
had followed us to t
wraps and the spare



"Very good, miss," answered the obedient Ridley, vanishing promptly.

When he came back with the volume, Miss Fairfax took it from his hand and turned the pages with deft fingers.

"Let me see!" she said. "It's arranged according to subjects—Fox Hunting, Stag Hunting, Fishing, Archery, Boating, Cricket, Golf, Skating, oh, here we are. 'Skating by Moonlight,' by William Wordsworth. That's not it. But fancy dear old Wordsworth writing on anything so frivolous as skating by moonlight! 'Mayfair on Skates,' by Cholmondley Pennell. That's not it either. Oh! here we are, 'With good steel ringing,' by"—she turned the page as she spoke. "It's by——"

She stopped abruptly, flushed with angry annoyance, and then with a sudden assumption of boredom, that was not likely to deceive any one present, she said—

"Really! How interesting! Quite a coincidence! It's actually by Mr. Rissler—at least I suppose so, for his name's to it. I'd no idea that he went in for song-writing as well as . . . shadowing—isn't that the word, Mr. Rissler? But come! It's little enough of skating weather we get in England, and it would be a sin to waste another moment discussing paper and print when we've got good

ice under our feet and blue sky over our heads."

With a petulant gesture she tossed the tiny volume towards the spot upon the ice where Ridley had placed the wraps. In her haste and annoyance she missed her mark, and, the book being thrown with some force, skimmed fifty yards along the ice, and passing obliquely between the two islands, came to a stop under the bank of that which was the farther from the point where we stood.

"I'm so sorry," Joyce said, turning to Lady Hampton, but looking with an angry sparkle in her eye at my unfortunate self, whom she apparently held responsible for what had happened. "I'd no idea it could have slid so far. Ridley, would you mind getting it?"

"Certainly, miss," answered the obedient Ridley. He was in the act of following the book when I stopped him.

"Wait a moment, Ridley," I called. "Miss Fairfax will, I am sure, pardon me, but she has perhaps forgotten that there's a spring between those islands and the water's deep. You're a very heavy man, and if you go that way, you'll very likely get in, whereas if you go round to the other side of the island, you can land safely enough and then, with your stick, you can hook the book towards you without trusting yourself upon the ice at all."

As I might have expected, I found myself in the wrong.

"Do nothing of the sort, please, Ridley," said Joyce angrily. "I'll fetch the book myself, since Mr. Rissler's afraid."

I was between her and the island, and as she made as if to strike out and skate by me, I placed a restraining hand upon her arm.

"You must not go," I said. "The place is really dangerous. I'll go myself, for I'm a good swimmer, and should come to no worse than a ducking if I did get in."

"Must not! Must not!" she exclaimed angrily. "And by what right do you dare to tell me, Mr. Rissler, what I must do, or must not?"

Ridley had withdrawn, and Lady Hampton was on the bank, and out of hearing.

"By the right of love, Joyce," I said quietly. "I love you, I reverence you, I honour you, with each breath I draw. Everything connected with you is sacred to me—the flowers you have worn, the least thing your hand has touched."

"Let me go! how dare you! You insult me!" she exclaimed indignantly.

As she spoke she pushed past me with such force, and so suddenly, that (oh, the shameful confession! was ever a declaration of love cut short thus ignominiously!) I was taken com-

pletely off my legs. It is, I believe, not uncommon for a rejected lover to be left kneeling, but a situation in which the rejected lover is —as the newspapers say of the House of Commons—"left sitting," has at least the element of novelty.

As Joyce Fairfax darted away in the direction of the island, the man who a moment before had laid all that he had to offer at Joyce Fairfax's feet, found himself seated on a small snow heap, and in so imbecile and hopelessly bewildered a state of mind, that he would have counted it a charity on the part of any one who had volunteered to inform him what was his own name and address. It is only on the stage that the hero of the piece is seen gallantly arrayed in plumed headpiece and Jack boots. In real life, the call that puts a man's courage to the mettle comes while yet he carries the clown's chalked face and painted nose and cheeks, just as in real life, tragedy hustles closely on the heels of farce.

Even while the silliness must yet have been on my face, even while I was yet in the act of rubbing myself to ease the pain of my fall, I heard a sudden crack that was followed by an ominous sound which rumbled along the surface of the ice to the spot where I so ruefully sat. I looked in the direction where



Joyce had dashed away, and for an instant she seemed to stop short and to stagger. Then a huge slab of ice thrust a sharp nose out of the water, like the snout of a sea-monster that has come to the surface to disport itself and breathe—I saw Joyce fling up her arms—heard a scream that suddenly bubbled into silence, and then she as suddenly disappeared.

With a wild shout for help—for Lady Hampton and Ridley had turned the corner of the shrubbery on their way to the house—I rushed to the edge of the jagged gaping hole where Joyce had vanished. Except for the disturbance of the water and the rocking and swaying of floating pieces of ice, there was no sign of her; but when I saw a couple of air-bubbles rise to the surface, I flung myself headforemost into the hole, and, throwing up my heels and beating upward with the back of my hands, I dived in the direction whence the bubbles came. Another few seconds and I should have been too late, for as my fingers closed upon her shoulder, and I ran my hand up her neck to get a grip upon her hair, I found that a strangling osier had noosed itself around that queenly throat, and was contending with the water for its victim, as one wild beast contends with another for the booty which each claims as its prey.

How I released her I do not know. My

hands must have done their work mechanically, for of the business of freeing her, I have no recollection. My next memory is that of rising through the water, holding fast to the unconscious Joyce, and of finding—God in heaven! shall I ever forget the horror of that moment?—that we had come up, not as I had expected, into the little space of open water, but were shut down under a floor of unyielding ice. Then suddenly my strength failed me, and Joyce and I went down to death together.



CHAPTER XXV

THE SOUL OF JOYCE FAIRFAX

I HAVE said that Joyce Fairfax and I went down to death together, and I say it anew in all seriousness. That we were brought back to life again is true, but not until we had traversed the dim borderland which lies between the two worlds, so that our souls had become separated from our bodies, and stood naked in each other's sight, and before God. That is the moment in which the seemingly fair Palace of Deceit, which some of us spend our lives in building, crumbles into a charnel house that holds only corruption and decay. That is the moment when the fair Robe of Lies, which we have woven to hide our uncleanliness from others, falls from us, and the Thing that the world thinks us to be, gives place to the Thing we are.

And in that moment the soul of Joyce Fairfax made confession to my soul. In the Unknown World into which she and I had penetrated, a hundred years are as one moment and one moment as a hundred years, for there

Time is not. It may—nay, it must have been—for no more than what we mortals call an instant, that she and I had seen into eternity, but in that moment each had seen the soul of the other as God sees it. My soul had looked upon her soul—AND I KNEW!

In the next instant Death gave place to Life within us, and Joyce and I were struggling in the water again, coffined-in under that cruel lid of ice.

I remember that in that moment of returning consciousness, I nerved myself to new effort, and in a very frenzy of despair struck out to this side and to that, groping with my disengaged hand for open water or broken ice. And then suddenly my strength failed me, and with it my reason. What it meant to me—holding such precious burden as I was then holding—to find myself within a few inches of God's open air, of life, of sunlight, of safety, and yet to know that the two of us were screwed down helplessly under that coffin lid of ice, can only perhaps be realized by those who have come near to being buried alive. That I was mad, I am sure. It seemed to me in that moment that it was the Devil himself with whom I was contending: I saw him distinctly on the other side of the ice, the Devil of my childhood, horned and fanged and clawed, grinning at



us, as through a window. It was he I thought who had sheeted and shut us in, and it seemed to me that as we, underneath the ice, shifted in our dying struggle, so he, above it, shifted his standpoint, lest we should break through and escape him ; and that it was he who held and thrust us down—like rats in a cage—to drown.

In the horror of the moment I called upon the name of God ; and I remember even then, when I was brought face to face, as I thought, with the Powers of Darkness ; when I, a helpless mortal was come to the death-grip with the Prince of Evil and the Arch Enemy of mankind—the thought that God is greater than the Devil was like the breeze-borne bugle call which tells a beleaguered garrison of the coming of relief.

But the Devil laughed mockingly.

" You are beyond God's help where you are," he said. " He and I struck a bargain long ago, and have shared the world between us. Everything above the earth, above the water, everything that lives in or under the heavens, is His. But everything under the sod, or under the surface of the water, is mine : and God cannot help you, for God cannot even hear you : and you, and the woman you hold in your arms, are mine, mine, mine, for evermore ! "

In my despair I called once again upon the Holy Name of God, and, gathering all my strength in one supreme effort, I hunched my shoulder against the floor of ice and strained till the strings of my eyeballs cracked. The ice seemed to give slightly, there was a sound like the sound of something breaking, and then—could it be? was it possible?—light! and the light of day!

I was at Hampton House, lying on a couch, and leaning over me was Joyce Fairfax with a look in her eyes that I had never seen there before.

"Joyce," I said, "Joyce—I have been into the other world."

"And I too," she said quietly.

"And, Joyce, it seemed to me in that other world that your soul made confession to mine of something that——"

"I know," she added. "It was true, all true. Listen, that I may tell it to you again, and in my own words.

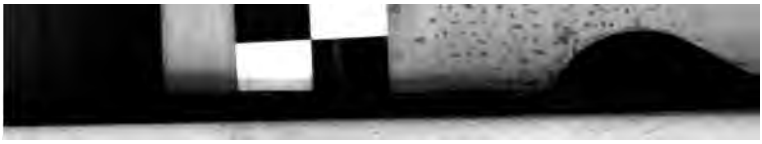
"For each of us there comes a temptation toward some secret sin—a temptation which the noble resist, to which the ignoble yield. And I, to whom you have accorded the worship that is rightly accorded to noble womanhood, must to you accuse myself of incredible baseness. In me vanity and love of

approbation have become, not merely a failing, but a disease that has cankered my whole nature. As a child I could not endure that another child should be preferred before me. Had I had a father, a mother, or even a faithful friend who, seeing the taint in my nature, had sought to eradicate it by encouraging me to think less of myself and more of others, by training me to self-repression and self-control, all might have been different. But my father and mother died when I was a child, and I became the ward of my father's lawyer. He was a widower with one son—a lad eight years my senior, and for a long time my only companion. My guardian meant well by me, but unfortunately his one anxiety was to control to my advantage the enormous fortune which I had inherited. To the investment of my capital, he gave all his thought; to the formation of my character, none. What training I had received tended only to foster my self-esteem. That I was an heiress—and to millions—was to my guardian sufficient reason for permitting me to gratify my lightest whim; and no one in the household was allowed to cross me in anything. His son was, on the contrary, encouraged to treat me with a subserviency which reacted as fatally upon himself as upon me.

"Soon after I became a member of the

family, the lad and I quarrelled, as young people who are thrown much together will, and though I was the aggressor, and entirely to blame, his father first thrashed him, and then compelled him to make an abject apology. Thenceforth, in all his dealings with me, the lad set himself to compass, by underhand methods what he could not compass by a straightforward course. Young as he was, he made diligent study of my weaknesses, and by playing upon my vanity, and humouring my whims, he so won his way into my good graces, that he succeeded in wheedling me out of no inconsiderable share of the handsome sum which was allowed me as pocket money.

"When I was sixteen and the lad twenty-four, he quarrelled with his father, and, leaving him, came to England. Thence he wrote to me saying that, his money being all gone and seeing no other way of making a living, he had enlisted as a soldier. Barrack life he declared to be unendurable, and so he begged me to send the money to buy his discharge, which I did. Thereafter I was constantly receiving applications for money. He told me in one letter that he had married and entered the police force. Then the news came that his wife was dead and that he had left the force and become a private detective.



"When his father died, broken-hearted and a bankrupt, having lost all he possessed in speculation, Norman — for you will have guessed that my guardian's son was the man whom you knew as Inspector Norman, turned up in America. He told me that he was penniless and begged that I would, for old association's sake, find him something to do, so I gave him the management of some property of mine in New York. That trust he faithfully discharged, and, finding that he was an able man of business, I allowed him to take over the control of other property, and, in time, came to rely upon him for the management of my affairs. This naturally threw us much together, and, had Norman been less astute, he would have spoilt everything—as many adventurers would in his place have done—by making love to me, in the hope that as my husband he might obtain control of my fortune. But he was wise enough to see that any such relationship was out of the question, and I was grateful, and allowed him, more and more, to step into the position of my adopted brother and confidential adviser.

"Whatever change had taken place in me, since he and I were boy and girl together, was for the worse. As a child I had been vain and selfish. As a woman I was hysterical,

neurotic, and so incredibly jealous that my jealousy amounted to monomania and disease. I use the word 'disease' in all sincerity, and not in mere self-excuse, for I have suffered all my life from a painful internal malady, and at no time was my jealousy so madly vindictive as when I was enduring physical pain. You will say, and rightly, that sin of every sort partakes of the nature of disease, but in my case it was, I am convinced, particularly so. I read once of a murderer upon whose body a post-mortem examination was held. When the surgeon came to lay open the head, he found a spike-like growth of bone upon the inner wall of the skull; and to the pressure and irritation of this thorn-like substance upon the brain, the surgeon attributed the homicidal mania which had brought the unhappy man to the gallows. In all the world there is no more delicately adjusted piece of mechanism than the nervous system of a woman. In many of us the relationship between the nervous system and the brain is so intimate that any disturbance of the one causes a corresponding disturbance in the other, and at such times of brain-tension and brain-irritation the sufferer takes the most distorted view of life, and acts in the most unaccountable manner. This may or may not be the explanation of my insane



jealousy, but that another woman should excel me in any accomplishment upon which I prided myself, was to me unendurable. Norman knew this unlovely side of my character, and by constant flattery he so contrived to get what I may call the blind side of me, that I was at no pains to conceal from him the jealousy with which I regarded those who outshone me in society, or who excelled me in any particular study or pursuit. This jealousy he did his best to fan into open flame. By repeating disparaging remarks which he had heard, or pretended to have heard, he encouraged me to entertain spite, and on more than one occasion, he anticipated and gratified that spite by wreaking a summary vengeance upon its object, and then delicately insinuating that he had done so to please himself, because my quarrel was his own.

"The man had sounded my vanity so well that he could say just the word that most roused me—the word that spurred me to have my own way at all costs, until from being merely inordinately vain and silly, I went on and on until I became actually wicked and base. One would suppose that a woman, at once so vain and so jealous, would be disliked by every one with whom she came into contact. It was not so in my case, for while my vanity made me vindictive to those

who wounded my self-love—the same vanity made me spare no pains to win the goodwill of every one else. And as those who opposed me were few, and those who gave way to me were many, I made friends wherever I went.

"The world, indeed, thinks me loving and tender; and it is true that I have all a woman's love and tenderness for the world's failures, for the afflicted, the suffering, and for the distressed. But it is precisely because they *are* failures, because they can never challenge successful comparison with my more fortunate self, that I pity and love them. Every woman I meet for the first time, I take the measure of, and settle with myself whether we are to be enemies or friends. To the women who do not threaten to dispute the first place with me, I can show such love and tenderness that many of them could believe no ill thing of me, and have come to love me with an adoring devotion, whereas for those who come into rivalry with me I have nothing but hatred. Some year or two after Norman had made himself an indispensable member of my household, I took up art as a study, and, at the class I attended, I was constantly being ruffled by one fellow student who, seeing the deference which was paid to me by the master and the other students, deliberately set herself to oppose me in everything. Before her



advent I queened it among my fellow students, not only by right of looks and of money, but also by the right of the genuine talent for art which I possessed. Before this girl's advent I was without a rival, but no sooner had she joined the class than she made it her business to flout me and oppose me on every opportunity. She was rich, she was beautiful, and her gifts as an artist amounted to something like genius. Norman saw how much I was chafed at being thus deposed from my sovereignty, and how much I dreaded the girl's rivalry in the prize for which we were both competing.

"'Don't you wish some one would keep her out of the way until the examination is over?' he said one day when I had been unburdening myself to him. 'It's easily done, and except for the mortification of being prevented from carrying away the prize before your eyes, she need never be a bit the worse.'

"'I'd give anything to any one who would do it for me,' I answered thoughtlessly. The possibility that my heedless words had been taken seriously never occurred to me—even when on examination day my rival failed to put in an appearance. In her absence, I had no difficulty in carrying off the coveted prize, and her mortification when she returned and

said she had only been prevented from being present at the examination by the unaccountable breakdown of a conveyance, was balm to my vanity. But even then I had no suspicion of what had happened, and it was not until weeks after that Norman hinted to me that the accident had been less accidental than was supposed. I was very angry with him, and said that nothing would have made me consent to such a course, but Norman only laughed, and said that my rival had received a very salutary lesson, with no harm done to her, and that as he accepted the entire responsibility, there was no occasion for me to distress myself.

"Well, by-and-by there came a time when some one else stood very seriously between me and the thing I coveted. I spoke no word of her to Norman, but she, too, was conveniently cleared out of my path by another mysterious accident in which she suffered nothing but inconvenience. This time, I was thoroughly frightened, and taxed Norman with the abduction. He made light of the whole matter, and assured me that I was disturbing myself without cause. He said that, thanks to the almost unlimited power of money, the matter had been so carefully arranged that it was impossible for the facts to come to light; and even were any difficulty to arise, he

assured me by everything he held sacred that no shadow of suspicion should ever fall upon myself. I was angry with him, and even threatened to denounce him to the friends of the person injured, but he said that he considered he had acted with my tacit approval. In support of this he quoted some hasty words of my own, which made me feel that I was as much committed to the responsibility of what had occurred as he. I am sure now that he did this of set purpose, for his intention was to get complete command of my money, which was invested in such a way that Norman could not lay hands upon it, except through me. Otherwise he would no doubt have taken the shorter course of forgery and flight. As things were, however, no sum of any importance could come into his hands except with my consent. To possess himself of my fortune, it was absolutely necessary, therefore, that I should be in his power; and it was for this reason, no doubt, that he schemed to entangle me into crime, and then to throw the responsibility of what had been done upon me. Once persuade us that we have taken the first step in wrong-doing, and are thenceforth irretrievably committed, and the rest is easy, for thereafter we become reckless in wrong-doing.

"You will guess to what all this is leading

up, and already you are protesting to yourself that you cannot and will not believe that a woman who in other respects is not wicked, could stoop to be a party to criminal acts, as these abductions undoubtedly were. But few criminals become criminals deliberately, at all events in the first instance. One of your writers has said that a convict or a man who drinks seems something so far off and horrible when we see him, but to himself he seems quite near to us and like us. We wonder what kind of a creature he is, but he is just we ourselves. It was so in my case. I never *meant* to do anything that was criminal. Even now I find it hard to think of myself as having done anything that can be so described, for Norman's fostering of my vanity was so adroit that I grew to believe that in insisting upon having my own way, and in seeking to be revenged upon those who withstood me, I was asking no more than my rights. Those who set themselves into opposition to me were deliberately setting themselves into opposition to the first principles of right and wrong, and it was themselves, not I, who were to blame, if they suffered in consequence. And so at last I ceased to question my conscience in regard to what was being done in my behalf, for it seemed to me that I ruled by right divine, and that

a thing became right or wrong according to whether I wished it or did not wish it. Egotism, indulged, is the opium of the conscience. The craving for larger doses increases, and, with the indulgence of the craving, comes the warping of the judgment, which so distorts the facts as to cause the sufferer to see things, not as they are, but as he or she wishes them to be. The Devil was the first ego-maniac, and when he stirred up war in Heaven he was in his own mind fully persuaded that his cause was just and that the opposition which was offered to him was impious. To the ego-maniac, nothing in all the world assumes such dominating proportions as his own will; for, to his will all the world must adapt itself; and to his will, duty to man, obligation to God, to conscience, and to the moral sense, must finally give place.

"Do not, however, misunderstand me. It was not I, in any single instance, who took the initiative in the matter of the abductions, and I doubt, indeed, whether even now I have done anything that would bring me personally within reach of the law. Norman played Mephistopheles to my Faust. He knew how intolerable it was to me to endure contradiction. He knew that my immense wealth had accustomed me to the gratification of every whim, and he made it his business to

see that my every whim was gratified. He watched my life closely, and if he saw that a certain person was an annoyance to me—that that person was receiving admiration and homage which I conceived to be rightly mine —he made use of the practically inexhaustible means at my command to place that person out of the sphere of rivalry. Again and again I rebelled, again and again I vowed that I would no longer be a party to such crimes, but Norman, whose power over me was nothing less than mesmeric, compelled me into inaction by cajolery and threats. At last he saw that, sooner or later, I should wrest myself from the hypnotic influence he was exercising over me, and should take action which would imperil his personal safety and my own. As his aim was now accomplished, and I, and consequently my fortune, were completely in his power, he promised that there should be no further abductions and that the prisoners should shortly be released.

"It was at this time that he told me of your own investigations into the case, and of his fear for the results. Norman's success thus far in evading the police had given me confidence in his continued evasion, but your appearance on the scene was a new cause of fear. Moreover, in Norman himself there was now a change which made me increasingly

uneasy. His manner, which had hitherto been obsequious, now became insolent, and his demands for large sums of money more frequent. The time had come, I suppose, when he considered me so completely in his power that all that remained for him to do was to blackmail me out of what was left of my fortune, and to disappear, leaving me to get out of my extremity as best I could. Terrified for the result of your investigations, and not knowing where to turn to escape from Norman, it occurred to me that if I could enlist your services on my behalf—bribe you in fact—I should turn a source of danger into a source of security and strength, and that you might even assist me in dealing with the blackmailer, whose attitude was every day becoming more and more of a menace. And then we met; and from the first my guilty conscience made me see in every word or action of yours the knowledge and the condemnation of my crime. It was to hunt me down, I thought, that you had come to St. Albans, and henceforth you were to me at once accuser and executioner. Sometimes I was moved to throw myself upon your mercy and to tell you all; at other times I feared you and hated you, as one hates the hand that is raised to strike one down. Your warning that I was to be the next victim of the ab-

ductors, I took to mean either that Norman intended to betray me to the police, or that you yourself had sufficient evidence to warrant my arrest, but that your consideration for your sister's friend prompted you to give me a chance of escape. That was the real reason for my flight from Lady Hampton's, and for remaining in hiding, and it was not until I read in the papers, the account of Norman's death and knew that the only person who could give evidence implicating me was out of the way, that I took my courage in both hands and decided to return to Lady Hampton's and brave it out.

"The rest you know, and you know me too —you who once loved me—for the thing that I am: an ego-maniac, a sufferer from that hideous disease which is the Elephantiasis of Personality—a monstrous morbid growth, distending into a leprous likeness of the Devil the fair human features that were once made in the likeness of God."

Joyce ceased, and for a time there was no sound in the room but her agonized sobbing. By-and-by she quieted somewhat, and I, who was lying back with shut eyes, felt a hand placed upon mine. Then, bending over me so that I could not see her face, Joyce spoke again.



"This is my confession to you, and it is the truth, but it is not all the truth. For I have not told you that I love you—have loved you from the first, and that it was my love for you which first made me see myself as I am. Already I have taken steps to undo as far as is possible the ill that has been done, and to make reparation; and I only wait a word from you to give myself up to the police. If you decide that this last course is not necessary, I will leave the country never to return. But, dear, be merciful to a sorely sinning but truly penitent woman. You loved me once. Now that you know me as I am, I know that your very love for me must kill your love for me, if it be not already dead. But do you think, dear, that—perhaps in years to come, when I have proved the sincerity of my repentance, you might . . . ever . . . come . . . to care for me again?"

And very sadly I made answer—

"I do not know, dear. The future is with God, and only He knows what it shall bring to pass."

For an hour or more neither of us spoke, and then there came a hasty knock at the door, which Joyce answered.

"An 'express letter' for you," she said quietly. "Do you think you ought to open

it ? You are very weak still, and the news it contains, whether good or ill, may be disturbing. Let me put it aside at least until to-morrow."

"I'm stronger than you suppose," I answered, "and must open it. It may be something that concerns us both—you especially—and it would distress me more to leave it unread, and to imagine that some danger menaced you than to read it. Give it me, please, and help me to sit up."

The letter was from a friend and fellow clubman of mine, the chief editor of one of our leading dailies.

"Dear Rissler," it ran, "I know that you are particularly interested in the Great Abduction Mystery and that you have been making investigations on your own account—not altogether without success. As you know, every one is on tenterhooks for the news that the *Urania* has been found and that the captured ladies are on their way home. I'm sorry to tell you that the *Urania* will never return. I have just received a wire to the effect that she has gone down off Thursday Island with the loss of every soul on board. The news will come like a thunderclap to the country, and especially to the relations of the imprisoned ladies, who have been counting so eagerly upon a speedy reunion, but you



can take my word for it that it is absolutely true, and that not a soul has been saved. You are the only person I've told outside the office, so be mum. We don't publish an evening edition, as you know, so I want to keep it for to-morrow's issue, when it is sure to make a tremendous sensation. What a tragedy it all is, and what a mystery. Norman, the prime instigator of the crimes, dead without giving up his secret, and now that his victims and accomplices have all gone down to one common death, the thing is likely to remain a mystery until the end of Time. It looks as if God Himself was in the conspiracy to hush the matter up. The Judgment Day——"

I had read thus far when a sudden faintness seized me. Joyce! Joyce! my one thought was of Joyce! How could I keep the news from her? And it would be in the morning papers! A strange helplessness came over me—darkness closed in around—I felt myself choking—flung out my arms wildly—and then I knew no more.

* * * * *

When I recovered consciousness it was to find that I was alone and that a pencilled note from Joyce was pinned upon the coverlet.

"Good-bye, dear Max," it ran. "I have read the letter and know all. I had hoped to



crunching of m
my heart I stag
looked out. The
of Joyce Fairfax




Stanford University Libraries
3 6105 022 364 421

STANFORD UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES
CECIL H. GREEN LIBRARY
STANFORD, CALIFORNIA 94305-6004
(415) 723-1493

All books may be recalled after 7 days

DATE DUE

